

A More Equitable Rebound

Inclusive Career Mobility and
Advancement Beyond COVID-19



Research by



Information and
Communications
Technology Council

Conseil des technologies
de l'information
et des communications

With funding from the Walmart Foundation



Preface

The Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC) is a not-for-profit national centre of expertise for strengthening Canada's digital advantage in a global economy. Through trusted research, practical policy advice, and creative capacity-building programs, ICTC fosters globally competitive industries enabled by innovative and diverse digital talent. In partnership with an extensive network of industry leaders, academic partners, and policymakers from across Canada, ICTC has empowered a robust and inclusive digital economy for over 30 years.

The research included in this report was made possible through funding from the Walmart Foundation. The findings, conclusions and recommendations presented in this report are those of ICTC alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Walmart Foundation.

To cite this report:

A More Equitable Rebound: Inclusive Career Mobility and Advancement Beyond COVID-19

Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), October 2023. Ottawa, Canada.

Researched, written, and supported by: Alexandra Cutean, ICTC Chief Research Officer; Faun Rice, ICTC Manager of Research and Knowledge Mobilization; Allison Clark, ICTC Research and Policy Analyst; Heather McGeer, ICTC Research and Policy Analyst; Olena Podolna, ICTC Administrative Research Assistant; Tedla Desta, Postdoctoral Fellow at Wilfred Laurier University; Sasha Hobbs, HSI Hobbs Strategic Insights; Ingrid Wilson, GridFern Strategic HR; Justin Ratcliffe, ICTC Economist; Todd Legere, ICTC Economist; Mansharn Toor, ICTC Research and Policy Analyst; Maya Watson, ICTC Research and Policy Analyst; Rob Davidson, ICTC Director of Data Science; Amal Das, ICTC Data Scientist; Jiansh Li, ICTC Junior Data Scientist, and the ICTC Research and Policy Team. In addition, numerous subject matter experts and service-providing organizations supported this project and are acknowledged on the subsequent page.



Acknowledgements

ICTC is grateful for the contributions of research participants, advisory committee members, and community partners who supported the organization of interviews and focus groups in their regions. This study was a success because of support from many, including but not limited to the following individuals and organizations.

Nabiha Atallah

Advisor, Strategic Initiatives, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS)

Darryl Bouvier

Indigenous Partnerships & Relationships, Vertex Resource Group Ltd.

Alfred Burgesson

Founder & CEO, Tribe Network

Tina-Marie Christian

Apna Management and Training Specialists

Molly Damiani

MDP - Indigenous Development, University of Winnipeg

Zoë David-Delves

Founder and Lead Consultant, David and Delves Consulting

Kadon Douglas

Executive Director, BIPOC TV & Film

Vanessa Doucet-Roche

Director of Program Delivery, Pinnguaq

Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council (ERIEC)**The First Nations University of Canada****Paul Gruner**

CEO, Tłıcho Investment Corporation (TIC)

Nathan Hall

CEO, Culture Check

Kelly Hashemi

Executive Director, Kiinago Biinoogi Muskiiki (Our Children's Medicine)

Chi Iliya-Ndule

Calgary Black Chambers

Maggie E.C. Jones

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Emory University

Sherman Kong

Founder & CEO, Tribe Network

Gail Langlais

Past Chair, The Manitoba Association for Career Development

Chief Joanne Miles

Flat Bay Band

Mr. Randy Miles

Flat Bay Band

Robynn Pavia

Associate Director of Nunavut Operations, Pinnguaq

Nicolas Polito

COO, Pinnguaq

Betty Punkert

Employment Facilitator, Osborne Village Resource Centre

Iain Reeve

Associate Director, Immigration Research, The Conference Board of Canada

Tanya Sinclair

Executive Director & Founder, Black Human Resources Professionals of Canada

Michael Tarnowski

Academic Chair, Algonquin College, School of Business & Hospitality

Emelyana Titarenko

Senior Advisor to the Minister of Health

Omar Yaqub

Servant of Servants, Islamic Family & Social Services Association



Contents

Executive Summary	6
Introduction	9
Key Terms	12
Part I: The Pandemic, Labour Market Disruption, and Recovery	16
Representation in the Workforce: Post-Pandemic Recovery	20
Personal Experiences of Labour Market Disruption: The Lasting Impacts of COVID	25
Talent Demand in the Canadian Workforce: The Post-Pandemic Landscape at a Glance	29
Part II: Career Mobility/Transition	34
The “Great Resignation” in the US and in Canada: Career Transition Decision-Making	37
Career Mobility: Barriers and Strategies	45
Entrepreneurship as a Career Transition	71
Part III: Career Advancement	77
Individual or Social Challenges for Inclusive Career Advancement	83
Group-Level Challenges for Inclusive Career Advancement	89
Organizational Challenges to Inclusive Career Advancement	96
Conclusion	112
Appendix	114





Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities in the Canadian workforce, impacting women, parents of young children, Indigenous, Black, racialized, and immigrant workers the most. Following the immediate impacts of the pandemic, labour market participation rates have been slower to recover for racialized workers. In Census 2021, for example, racialized people with post-secondary education experienced unemployment rates almost double that of their non-racialized counterparts. Despite high unemployment rates, especially for racialized workers, recruiting and retaining employees remains one of Canadian businesses' top challenges.

To examine the pandemic's ongoing impact on racialized communities, this report focuses on two key themes: career mobility and career advancement. Drawing from extensive primary research with racialized workers, employers, and subject matter experts, this paper highlights the ways in which employers, educational institutions, and civil society can better support workers to transition and advance in their careers fluidly. Throughout the report, summary tables offer a customizable toolkit of recommendations and resources for these groups.



Career mobility is the ability to change roles or occupations within an organization or between organizations. Career mobility is shaped by individual choices, employer openness to reskilling and hiring career transitioners, and systemic differences between sectors and occupations that make it more or less challenging for people to mobilize transferable skills or access new educational opportunities. A lack of career mobility contributes to earnings disparities for newcomers and immigrants to Canada, Indigenous Peoples, and Black workers in Canada. Moreover, improved career mobility is important insurance for workers whose roles are threatened by automation or displacement, making it vital that everyone has equitable access to career mobility.

Employers can improve equitable access to career mobility during recruitment, hiring, retention, and everyday operations. Strategies include redesigning job requirements to encourage applicants with diverse lived and professional experiences, as well as participating in career matchmaking services or bridging programs. Employers can also reduce barriers for internationally educated professionals transferring their experience to Canada by examining their hiring processes for bias toward Canadian experience.

Access to inclusive reskilling is also an essential component of supporting equitable career mobility. However, reskilling—or recredentialing for newcomers taking a similar program for a second time to gain a foothold in a new country—is a significant financial risk. Educational institutions can reduce this risk by applying flexible prior learning assessments that consider lived experience and informal education. Recredentialing programs that include holistic supports, subsidies, and scholarships are likely to better support career transitioners. Furthermore, community-led training institutions play an essential role in developing culturally relevant mentorship and training. Educational institutions can partner with such organizations to help reduce barriers to program entry. Finally, a focus on employability can reduce the risk associated with reskilling for adult learners. Work-integrated learning (WIL), accessible labour market information, and inclusive safety nets and funding programs are essential to helping adult learners take on innovative risks and pursue retraining.

Career advancement is a positive progression in one's career, which can include promotions in title, improved pay, expanded skill sets, and vertical or lateral assignments to positions of increased responsibility or visibility. For many, COVID-19's socioeconomic impacts meant that advancement opportunities disappeared or career goals had to be put on hold. As of 2023, racialized and immigrant workers were still underrepresented in senior manager positions in Canada.



Employer-side barriers to promoting racialized and immigrant professionals include unconscious and conscious bias and discrimination, resulting in microaggressions and other acts of exclusion that prevent equitable promotion practices. Many research participants engaged in this study said that workplace discrimination remains prevalent across the country, affecting who is and is not promoted into senior-level roles. To mitigate these challenges, employers should work to develop a strong and collaborative EDI strategy and an Indigenous inclusion strategy, set targets to increase the number of racialized workers at leadership levels, and back each of these initiatives with resources, monitoring, and evaluation. In action, strategies for equitable promotion will extend to unconscious bias training, skill development opportunities for employees, transparent and inclusive promotional criteria, and documented and standardized performance evaluations.

While the COVID-19 pandemic hit businesses and workers across Canada, its inequitable fallout and continuing legacy reveal a clear opportunity. Improved access to career mobility and advancement would support a more equitable rebound for workers from Indigenous, Black, immigrant, and racialized groups and communities. Many Canadian employers report facing challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled talent but often report uncertainty about why they aren't receiving more diverse applicants. A paradigm shift in recruitment, retention, and investment is required: strategies for improving workplace equity are well-known and synthesized in this report, but a first essential step is for workplaces to approach the opportunity to transform intentionally. Supported by educational institutions and civil society, a genuine approach to diverse and equitable reskilling, upskilling, hiring, and promoting will support workers and businesses alike to undertake greater innovative risk.





Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact the Canadian economy, as well as the health of people living in Canada. In May 2023, the World Health Organization downgraded COVID-19 from a “global emergency” while clarifying that it remained a serious or endemic global health threat in many regions, marking just over three years since the crisis was initially announced.¹ However, the lasting and interrelated health inequities, social determinants of health,² and economic impacts highlighted and created by the pandemic make it difficult to identify a definitive end date for the COVID-19 crisis.³ It is also important to understand the continuing impact of COVID-19 on the healthcare system, procurement and supply chains, and communities served by healthcare systems. A three-year assessment of the Canadian economy shows that affordability remains a key concern for Canadians, while supply chains and labour-related obstacles continue to impact many businesses throughout the country.⁴ Furthermore, self-reported mental health has been negatively impacted across the country, particularly among younger Canadians.⁵

1 The Associated Press, “WHO Downgrades COVID Pandemic, Says It’s No Longer a Global Emergency,” CBC, May 5, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/who-pandemic-not-emergency-1.6833321>.

2 Black Health Alliance, “Social Determinants of Health,” n.d., <https://blackhealthalliance.ca/home/social-determinants-health/>

3 Sianne Kuang et al., “Experiences of Canadians with long-term symptoms following COVID-19,” Statistics Canada, December 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2023001/article/00015-eng.htm>

4 Statistics Canada, “Research to Insights: A Look at Canada’s Economy and Society Three Years after the Start of the COVID-19 Pandemic,” March 9, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2023004-eng.htm>

5 Ibid.



While every person living in Canada has been impacted in some way by the pandemic and its economic legacy, the burden of pandemic impacts has been disproportionately borne by racialized groups, peoples and communities and intersections of identity. Existing research has examined labour market disparity and recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic and identified continued inequity in employment access, health,⁶ financial stability, food security,⁷ and access to housing opportunities and equitable wages for people identifying as Black, Indigenous, and racialized, or as newcomers and immigrants to Canada despite a tight labour market and rising wages overall. One study concludes, “A rising tide does not lift all boats. Clearly, further policy interventions are needed to address the continued gaps in labour market outcomes for much of the racialized labour force, and for Black workers, in particular.”⁸ Similarly, work led by the First Nations Technology Council and supported by ICTC in British Columbia identified a persistent dearth of Indigenous people in well-paying roles in the technology sector, driven by “broad systemic barriers to Indigenous access to and participation in tech employment and education.”⁹ This report highlighted the importance of supporting Indigenous advancement and leadership in order to improve systemic barriers and inequitable access in workplaces and schools with insightful lived experience.

To examine the pandemic’s ongoing impact on racialized communities, including intersections with immigration status, *A More Equitable Rebound* focuses on two key themes: career mobility and career advancement. This project takes its lead from existing work, and rather than re-interrogating known inequities in employment and salary, it examines the ways in which employers, educational institutions, and civil society can support workers to transition and advance in their careers fluidly. Career *advancement* shifts the focus from representation in the workplace to how representation can be developed and addressed within leadership in the workplace. Meanwhile, career mobility has been in the news for the last few years for several reasons: colloquially, the “great resignation” (primarily a phenomenon in the United States, with echoes of impact in Canada¹⁰) identifies a trend where workers are more likely to be ready to leave their jobs or careers. Recent upticks in career mobility may have been triggered by COVID-19-related lockdowns and layoffs—giving people time to reassess their career goals.

6 Tara Hahmann and Mohan Kumar, “Unmet health care needs during the pandemic and resulting impacts among First Nations people living off reserve, Métis and Inuit,” Statistics Canada, August 2022, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2022001/article/00008-eng.htm>

7 Statistics Canada, “Food insecurity among Canadian families, 2022,” November 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/231114/dq231114a-eng.htm>

8 Sheila Block and Grace-Edward Galabuzi, “A Rising Tide Does Not Lift All Boats,” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, July 5, 2023, <https://monitormag.ca/reports/a-rising-tide-does-not-lift-all-boats/>

9 “Indigenous Leadership in Technology: Understanding Access and Opportunities in British Columbia,” First Nations Technology Council, Information and Communications Technology Council, Reciprocal Consulting Inc., 2022, Canada.

10 See: Part II, Career Mobility, Section: The ‘Great Resignation’ in the US and in Canada: Career Transition Decision-making



For example, some Canadian workers who experienced COVID-related layoffs also received the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) or other supports. Furthermore, remote and hybrid work opportunities may have begun to provide new opportunities that did not previously exist, including for those with accessibility concerns.¹¹ As Part II of this study will discuss, some of these workers were able to take stock of their careers and transition due to a desire for greater security, fulfillment, or professional aspirations. Others reported leaving due to experiences of burnout, work/life balance, and a desire for a better work environment.

Accordingly, this study asks what the experiences of racialized groups, peoples, communities, and newcomer and immigrant communities are in reinventing their careers and/or advancing their careers. And, most importantly, what can employers, educational institutions, civil society, and policymakers do to better support career mobility and advancement for people belonging to equity-deserving groups? Within these research questions and objectives, ICTC has sought to prioritize the primary concerns identified by organizations that include and work directly with Indigenous and racialized groups, peoples, communities, and newcomer and immigrant communities.

Primarily, this study draws from nearly 300 conversations with people in Canada who identify as Black, Indigenous, racialized, and/or newcomers and immigrants (see Appendix for further details). These research contributors spoke with ICTC through in-depth interviews or focus groups about their career-related experiences during and after COVID-19.

The ICTC Equitable Rebound Employer Survey (n = 503), hereafter referred to as “employer survey,” was delivered across Canada to persons in roles responsible for hiring and people management in companies with at least 50 personnel in 2022. The employer survey asked about workplace strategies that support inclusion, advancement, and leadership development for equity-deserving communities.

Finally, ICTC collected over 2 million job posts between April 2022 and October 2023 in order to assess what types of jobs are in demand in Canada, where these exist, and what transferable technical and human skills the job postings are asking for. Throughout this paper, labour demand analysis is complemented by secondary data from Statistics Canada’s Census, Labour Force Survey, and data gathered by ICTC researchers.

11

Ingrid Wilson, “The Future of Work Is an Opportunity to Do Better With DEI,” May 2023.
<https://www.reworked.co/employee-experience/the-future-of-work-is-an-opportunity-to-do-better-with-dei/>



Part I of this paper outlines the impact of COVID-19 on research participants' careers, employers, businesses, and the state of Canadian labour market demand in the months and years following the first lockdown in March 2020.

Part II defines career mobility and labour market segmentation before moving to a discussion of the "great resignation" and research contributors' experiences of changing careers. The section then covers key challenges and solutions related to career mobility at the level of workplaces and employers. Finally, it discusses reskilling and the role of civil society and educational institutions in supporting career transitioners.

Part III discusses inclusive career advancement. This section begins by outlining broad systemic challenges to career advancement and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, it examines specific challenges and solutions related to inclusive career advancement that workplaces can address.



Key Terms

Like gender, race is widely recognized to be a social construct, yet systemic inequities often fall disproportionately along constructed demographic lines. For organizations conducting research to identify systemic racism, it is important to note that terminology such as “racialized” or “Black, Indigenous, and people of colour” may evolve with self-identification.¹² For example, concerns have been raised about the term “visible minority,” which is under review by organizations like Statistics Canada despite still being used in several surveys and data products.¹³ In this paper, ICTC primarily uses terminology that mirrors the language used by the data’s source, be that a qualitative research contributor, a statistical agency, or another researcher. Furthermore, ICTC recognizes that language is living, and research contributors or readers may not identify with the terms used herein.

BIPOC stands for Black Peoples, Indigenous Peoples, and people(s) of colour. Some scholars “reject the term people(s) of colour and the acronym BIPOC because they conflate issues across all people who are not white. As a result, these terms and acronyms can be used to erase important differences in the historical and contemporary experiences of the peoples identified with that label, including Black and Indigenous Peoples.”¹⁴ Accordingly, this paper seeks to use more specific terminology rather than generalizing across experiences wherever possible. In addition, the phrase “racialized, immigrant, and newcomer” is sometimes used to refer to the entirety of the sample of research contributors who lent their time to this project.

Equity-deserving refers to communities that are inequitably or disproportionately represented or negatively impacted in a particular domain (e.g., in the technology sector, women are underrepresented and thus equity-deserving). Equity-deserving is a newer term for “equity-seeking,” “marginalized,” or “historically marginalized.”

First Nations is a term used to describe Indigenous Peoples of Canada who belong to distinct and independent First Nations (political governance entities made up of members of the First Nation community) and are neither Métis nor Inuit. First Nations peoples have a significant diversity of cultures, languages, and political ideologies and vast geographical dispersion across the land known as Canada.¹⁵ First Nations people have the right to self-determination and identify with their ancestral Indigenous origins rather than a federally regulated reserve status.¹⁶

12 Bryony Lau, “Census 2021: Canadians Are Talking about Race. But the Census Hasn’t Caught Up.,” *The Conversation*, May 3, 2021, <http://theconversation.com/census-2021-canadians-are-talking-about-race-but-the-census-hasnt-caught-up-158343>

13 Statistics Canada, “Visible minority of person,” n.d., Retrieved Jan 8, 2024, <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3Var.pl?Function=DEC&id=45152>

14 Julia Lane, “Black Peoples, Indigenous Peoples, People(s) of Colour (BIPOC): Inclusive and antiracist writing,” *SLC Inclusive and Antiracist Writing Guides*, Sept. 06, 2023, <https://www.lib.sfu.ca/about/branches-depts/slc/writing/inclusive-antiracist-writing/bipoc>

15 “Assembly of First Nations – The Story,” *Assembly of First Nations*, Retrieved January 3, 2024, <http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=59>

16 “Terminology in Indigenous content,” *Government of British Columbia*, October 6, 2023, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/services-for-government/service-experience-digital-delivery/web-content-development-guides/web-style-guide/writing-guide-for-indigenous-content/terminology#first-nations>



Métis are part of a distinctive cultural group with a specific social history in Canada. The term initially referred to the children of Indigenous and European relationships, but over generations, it has come to refer to the collective of cultures and ethnic identities that emerged as Métis communities developed.¹⁷ Distinct Métis communities developed along the routes of the fur trade and across the Northwest within the Métis Nation Homeland, including Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, as well as parts of Ontario, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, and the northern United States.¹⁸

Inuit are a legally and culturally distinct Indigenous group historically located in the Arctic and northern regions of Labrador, Quebec, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories.¹⁹ The circumpolar Inuit homelands spread across Canada, Greenland, Alaska, and Chukotka (Russia). The singular of Inuit is “Inuk,” and because the translation of Inuit is “the people,” it is redundant to add “people” after it.²⁰

Indigenous is an all-encompassing term that is often used on a global level to include the Indigenous Peoples living in what is now known as Canada as well as other countries. Within the context of this report, the terms Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples are used to represent the three populations of Indigenous Peoples within Canada: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.²¹ Importantly, pan-Indigenous research has limited effectiveness. Where possible, when referring specifically to First Nations, Inuit, or Métis data, the terms specific to their population group are used instead throughout this report.

Newcomers (to Canada): In some cases, the term newcomer refers to immigrants who have been in Canada for five years or less.²² Increasingly, however, governments (as well as industry and supporting organizations) are adopting “newcomer” as a more inclusive term. This term may avoid the possible stigma that is sometimes attached to the words “immigrant” and “refugee.”²³ Yet, it is worth noting that not all immigrants and refugees are new arrivals to Canada and may have been here for many years.²⁴

Racialized Peoples: Racialization is the “process by which societies construct races as real, different and unequal in ways that matter to economic, political and social life.”²⁵ The Ontario Human Rights Commission notes that “the term “racialized” is widely preferred over descriptions such as “racial minority,” “visible minority” or “person of colour,” as it expresses race as a social construct rather than a description of people based on perceived characteristics.”²⁶

17 Indigenous Foundations, “Métis,” First Nations & Indigenous Studies, The University of British Columbia, 2009, <https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/metis/>

18 “About Us,” Métis National Council, Retrieved January 3, 2024, <https://www.metisnation.ca/about/about-us>

19 “About Canadian Inuit,” Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Retrieved January 3, 2024, <https://www.itk.ca/about-canadian-inuit/>

20 “Indigenous peoples: Language Guidelines,” The University of British Columbia, 2018, https://heritagebc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ubc_indigenous_peoples_language_guide.pdf

21 “Indigenous Leadership in Technology: Understanding Access and Opportunities in British Columbia,” First Nations Technology Council, Information and Communications Technology Council, Reciprocal Consulting Inc., 2022, Canada., p. 9

22 “Find Free Newcomer Services Near You,” Government of Canada, accessed July 2023, <https://ircc.canada.ca/english/newcomers/services/index.asp>

23 Jay Heisler, “Immigrant or Refugee? In Canada, All Are ‘Newcomers,’” Voice of America, October 22, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/immigrant-or-refugee-in-canada-all-are-newcomers-6800297.htm>

24 Liliiana Nakamura, “Not All Immigrants are Newcomers,” Medium, January 22, 2023, <https://lilynaka.medium.com/not-all-immigrants-are-newcomers-8f321beeb5df>

25 Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System, Report of the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System, 1995, pp. 40-41. For more information, see OHRC, Policy, supra note 5.

26 Ontario Human Rights Commission, “Introduction,” Under suspicion: Research and consultation report on racial profiling in Ontario, 2017, https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/under-suspicion-research-and-consultation-report-racial-profiling-ontario/1-introduction#_ednref19



Visible Minority: Visible minority is a term no longer used by most contemporary sources to describe racialized groups, communities, and peoples. Where it appears in this report, it is in direct reference to a quotation or data source from Statistics Canada.

Intersectionality is the concept that individuals navigate through multiple forms of social and structural barriers simultaneously.²⁷

A note on identity intersectionality and discrimination: While LGBTQ2SIA+ and ability/disability data were not collected in this study, gender, LGBTQ2SIA+ identity, and disability and accessibility inclusion are intersectional components of racial discrimination that cannot be underestimated. ICTC recognizes that the employment experiences of LGBTQ2SIA+ individuals are commonly characterized by prejudice and discrimination, resulting in labour market inequities that are systemic, mutually reinforcing with those in other spheres, and compounded by other forms of oppression.²⁸ ICTC also acknowledges that persons with disabilities face significant barriers to employment and have the lowest rate of employment among underrepresented groups.²⁹ In conducting research with Indigenous, Black, and Peoples of Colour, as well as members of the LGBTQ2SIA+ community and persons with a disability, ICTC acknowledges that groups of people are not homogenous, and individuals have multiple, diverse intersecting factors that shape their perspectives and impact their employment and career experiences. The experiences of individuals are complex and not indicative of or related to one single social identity. This study maintains an intersectional approach to its methodology and analysis of research findings.

A note on gendered terminology: Every research contributor's experience is intersectional and includes gendered experiences. The authors have sought to use the pronoun identified by research contributors wherever possible. In addition, the terms "women" and "men" are trans-inclusive throughout.

27 Chia Longman and Katrien De Graeve, "From Happy to Critical Diversity: Intersectionality as a Paradigm for Gender and Diversity Studies," *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 2014, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 33-39, <https://doi.org/10.11116/jdivegendstud.1.1.0033>

28 Kelsey Brennan, Chloe Halpenny, and Basia Pakula, "LGBTQ2S+ voices in employment: Labour market experiences of sexual and gender minorities in Canada," The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, April 2022, <https://srdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/wage-phase-3-final-report.pdf>

29 "Disability Inclusion and Accessibility," Employment and Social Development Canada, February 23, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/reports/esdc-transition-binders/inclusion-2021-infographic.html>





PART I

The Pandemic, Labour Market, and Recovery



A First Nations career development instructor described a recent experience teaching courses at a British Columbia college and said that she felt that COVID had given many of her students an opportunity to reflect on “the instability within their lives,” “what they were doing and if that is what they wanted to do.”

A research contributor identifying as a person of colour from Ontario was working as a flight attendant and was laid off at the beginning of the pandemic. Their employer offered the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), but they didn’t find it to be enough to live on, so they moved cities to find work because their education in hospitality wasn’t turning up any potential jobs at the time.



In Montreal, a research contributor identifying as a Black man reported no change to his job from the pandemic. “We continued working, but we worked remotely,” he said, and he did not feel that the pandemic had impacted his advancement prospects.

Research contributors shared about nearly 300 personal experiences of COVID-19's labour market impact, and every person's story was distinct. Nevertheless, across the country, aggregate trends suggested some clear patterns in labour market experiences. Between February and April 2020, Canada saw a 15% reduction in employment, with more than half of jobs lost belonging to low-income workers (workers "in the bottom quartile of weekly earnings").³⁰ Overrepresented in these job losses were public-facing sectors, including accommodation, food, and retail services.³¹ Younger workers, non-unionized workers, and workers paid hourly were some of the hardest hit by initial layoffs.³² As 2020's economic turbulence continued to unfold, labour market research found that COVID-19 exacerbated existing inequalities in the workforce, impacting women, parents of young children,³³ Indigenous Peoples, racialized workers,³⁴ Black workers,³⁵ and immigrants the most.³⁶ Furthermore, workforce characteristics were clearly tied to public health and exposure to the virus, with many witnessing "overlapping and compounding risks related to sex, gender, racialization, income, housing, employment, and other socioeconomic factors."³⁷ For example, health support staff were disproportionately made up of women and immigrants, and racialized groups were also overrepresented in meat processing plants, the sites of several COVID-19 outbreaks.³⁸

Similarly, many studies that traced the pandemic's impact have shown that it was highly intersectional. Racialized, Indigenous, and newcomer women have continued to face overlapping barriers to workforce participation and advancement. One study of immigrant employment outcomes suggests that while coming to Canada often comes with "downward occupational mobility," this was particularly salient for women newcomers and immigrants during the pandemic:

“The pandemic placed an increased strain on highly skilled immigrant women who need to care for their families and seek commensurate employment in a predominantly online work environment, limiting their access to social capital and support. As a result, these women encountered delayed, interrupted or reversed career trajectories, which were made worse by limited employment opportunities, financial instability, growing family responsibilities and mental health challenges. There is potential that the growing gap in career progression to balance work and family will have long-term and unpredictable occupational outcomes as these women continue to build their personal and professional lives.”³⁹

30 Thomas Lemieux et al., "Initial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Canadian labour market," *Canadian Public Policy*, 2020, Vol. 46, pp. S55-S65, <https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2020-049>

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Yue Qian & Sylvia Fuller, "COVID-19 and the gender employment gap among parents of young children," *Canadian Public Policy*, 2020, Vol. 46, pp. S89-S101, <https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2020-077>

34 Statistics Canada, "COVID-19 in Canada: A One-Year Update on Social and Economic Impacts," March 11, 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2021001-eng.pdf>

35 "Widening inequality: Effects of the pandemic on jobs and income," Toronto Metropolitan University, May 2021, <https://www.torontomu.ca/diversity/reports/widening-inequality/>

36 Statistics Canada, "Impacts of COVID-19 on immigrants and people designated as visible minorities," Oct 2020 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/2020004/s6-eng.htm>; Feng Hou, Garnett Picot, and Jue Zhang, "Transitions into and out of employment by immigrants during the COVID-19 lockdown and recovery," Statistics Canada, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00070-eng.htm>

37 Public Health Agency of Canada, "From Risk to Resilience: An Equity Approach to COVID-19 - The Chief Public Health Officer of Canada's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada 2020," October 29, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/corporate/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-public-health-canada/from-risk-resilience-equity-approach-covid-19.html>

38 Ibid.

39 Luciana Nardon et al., "Skilled Immigrant Women's Career Trajectories during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Canada," *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal* 41, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 122, <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-09-2020-0255>



For many newcomers to Canada, delays in the immigration system exacerbated barriers to employment and advancement.⁴⁰ Research participants described not getting their visas on time, having to defer their education programs, or losing time that could have been spent applying for jobs. Some reported being stuck on the other side of an unanticipated border closure: an Edmonton participant had graduated with a Mechanical Engineering degree in Canada in early 2020 and went to his home country for personal reasons, then got “stuck there.” He returned to Canada only to find a recession in Alberta.⁴¹

Parents were also directly impacted: The workforce participation rate of Indigenous parents decreased for both women and men during the pandemic. That said, “the decline was greater for Indigenous mothers, in part because they are more likely to engage in unpaid work such as caring for children and family members.”⁴² Following the first set of lockdowns, the employment rate of Indigenous men rose again between June – August 2020 but continued to decline for Indigenous women over the same time period, again likely due to caregiving duties for children and elders.⁴³

Businesses owned by racialized persons also faced significant financial impacts during the pandemic. An economic development lead for a First Nation in BC described how Indigenous-led tourism had sustained many people in northern communities in Canada but had been rapidly undercut by border closures and travel guidelines—though necessary for keeping northern communities safe. Similarly, a 2020 interview with the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Businesses (CCAB) noted that an “extremely high number of Indigenous businesses... have been negatively affected by COVID-19.”⁴⁴ An inclusion specialist and research contributor commented that it was often harder for Black business owners to get business loans to help with insurance against uncertainty in income, a trend that is also true for First Nations and other Indigenous-owned businesses.⁴⁵ Furthermore, one study of entrepreneurship and sole proprietorship in Canada found, between February and May 2020, a “substantial decrease in ownership and aggregate hours for women, immigrants, and less educated people,” particularly those offering services related to arts, culture, and recreation; education, law, social, community, and government; or sales and services.⁴⁶

In short, these examples paint a clear picture of aggregate inequities perpetuated by the pandemic but also illustrate the diversity of personal experiences. Qualities like race, ethnicity, immigration status, gender, parenthood, prior income, and education all informed the impact of COVID-19. In a similar way, post-pandemic economic recovery cannot yet be described as an equitable rebound.

40 Salma Zahid, “Immigration in the Time of COVID-19: Issues and Challenges, Report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration,” House of Commons Canada, May 2021, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/432/CIMM/Reports/RP11312743/cimmrp05/cimmrp05-e.pdf>

41 Tom Vernon, “Alberta’s economy hardest hit of all Canadian provinces in 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic,” Global News, May 4, 2021, <https://globalnews.ca/news/7834442/alberta-economy-pandemic/>

42 Amanda Bleakney, Huda Masoud, and Henry Robertson, “Labour market impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous people: March to August 2020,” Statistics Canada, November 2, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00085-eng.htm>

43 Ibid.

44 Tabatha Bull, “How COVID-19 is impacting Indigenous businesses,” Innovating Canada, Retrieved January 8, 2024, <https://www.innovatingcanada.ca/industry-and-business/how-covid19-is-impacting-indigenous-businesses/>

45 Indigenous Leadership in Technology: Understanding Access and Opportunities in British Columbia,” First Nations Technology Council, Information and Communications Technology Council, Reciprocal Consulting Inc., 2022, Canada.

46 Louis-Philippe Beland, Oluwatobi Fakorede, and Derek Mikola, “Short-term effect of COVID-19 on self-employed workers in Canada,” *Canadian Public Policy*, 2020, Vol. 46, no. 1, pp. S66-S81.



Representation in the Workforce: Post-Pandemic Recovery

Data on the post-COVID economic recovery has suggested that labour market participation rates were slower to recover for racialized workers: a finding enabled by Statistics Canada, including a question allowing respondents to identify as racialized in its labour force survey for the first time.⁴⁷ Block and Galabuzi conclude that in 2021 and 2022, “as the recovery took hold, the strengthening labour market had an uneven impact.”⁴⁸ Focusing on the province of Ontario, Block and Galabuzi show that the employment/population ratio changed more slowly for Black workers than for white or other racialized communities during this time, particularly for Black women. Labour force data for the rest of Canada shows a similar trend: while in 2022 and 2023, the unemployment rate for people not identifying as racialized dropped back below 5%, for Black workers, it remained above 8%.⁴⁹

Similarly, the unemployment rate for First Nations workers took longer to recover than other groups. Figure 1 shows the annual change in unemployment rate before and after the pandemic for First Nations, Métis, and non-Indigenous Peoples. The labour force survey does not have data available for Inuit communities. For First Nations individuals without post-secondary education, the unemployment rate continued to rise following the pandemic between 2020 and 2021, whereas for all other groups in Figure 1, the unemployment rate began to recover.⁵⁰



47 "In the spring of 2020, Statistics Canada began, for the first time, to collect Labour Force Survey (LFS) data for racialized workers. For the first 18 months, from July 2020 to December 2021, this data was collected for the population from 15 to 69 years of age through a supplement to the main survey. Starting in January 2022, these estimates were moved to the main survey." Sheila Block and Grace-Edward Galabuzi, "A rising tide does not lift all boats: Ontario's colour-coded labour market recovery," *The Monitor*, July 5, 2023, <https://monitormag.ca/reports/a-rising-tide-does-not-lift-all-boats>

48 Ibid.

49 Based on data from March 2022 – Oct 2023. "Labour force characteristics by visible minority group, three-month moving averages, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality" Statistics Canada, Table: 14-10-0373-01, Retrieved Jan 8, 2024, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl/en/tv.action?pid=1410037301>

50 Labour force characteristics by Indigenous group and educational attainment 1 Frequency: Annual Table: 14-10-0359-01 (formerly CANSIM 282-0228) Release date: 2023-01-06 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl/en/cv.action?pid=1410035901>



Unemployment Rate for Individuals 25–54 years, Annual % Change

		2018–2019	2019–2020 PANDEMIC	2020–2021	2021–2022
First Nations	Total, all education levels	-1%	27%	-5%	-36%
	Less than high school	-11%	26%	5%	-32%
	High school graduate or some post-secondary	3%	28%	12%	-43%
	Completed post-secondary education	1%	30%	-18%	-31%
Métis	Total, all education levels	-14%	60%	-33%	-20%
	Less than high school	-7%	63%	-39%	20%
	High school graduate or some post-secondary	-9%	33%	-34%	-25%
	Completed post-secondary education	-20%	91%	-29%	-28%
Non-Indigenous population	Total, all education levels	-4%	70%	-22%	-30%
	Less than high school	1%	42%	-7%	-21%
	High school graduate or some post-secondary	5%	75%	-18%	-34%
	Completed post-secondary education	-7%	73%	-25%	-29%

Education level had a significant impact on unemployment in this data, and it is crucial to interpret it in the context of systemic lack of access to culturally safe and supported secondary education in many communities, an issue emphasized by several Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada that are just beginning to be addressed.





Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement with the primary objective of fostering reconciliation across Canada. It compiled findings from over 6,500 witnesses and 5 million records to help create a record of the residential school system and its impacts.⁵¹ In June 2015, the TRC released its final report with 94 Calls to Action to further reconciliation between Canadians and Indigenous Peoples.⁵² Listed below are 11 of the Calls to Action related to education. As of 2023, some progress has been made towards some of these recommendations: a variety of trackers exist with detailed status updates.⁵³

Legacy Calls to Action

#6

We call upon the Government of Canada to repeal Section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada.

(i) Section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada permits the use of corporal punishment for discipline within educational settings. This call to action aims to repeal this section due to the documented evidence of widespread corporal punishment and abuse of children by staff in the residential school system, with the TRC noting, “The failure to develop, implement, and monitor effective discipline sent an unspoken message that there were no real limits on what could be done to Aboriginal children within the walls of a residential school.”⁵⁴

#7

We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

(i) This call to action aims to resolve the disparities in education and employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians by addressing the systemic barriers created by colonization.

#8

We call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.

(i) This call to action aims to resolve the disparities in educational funding between children educated on and off reserve to ensure the equitable access to quality education for all Indigenous children.

#9

We call upon the federal government to prepare and publish annual reports comparing funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves, as well as educational and income attainments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compared with non-Aboriginal people.

(i) This call to action aims to create a mechanism for accountability to have ongoing, transparent monitoring of the government’s financial allocations and the educational outcomes of Indigenous children, enabling them to make evidence-based policy adjustments.

#10

We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:

- i Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gap within one generation.
- ii Improving education attainment levels and success rates.
- iii Developing culturally appropriate curricula.
- iv Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.
- v Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.
- vi Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.
- vii Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships.

(i) This call to action aims to provide guiding principles for co-creating new educational legislation and ensure sufficient funding to enact the changes needed to create a more inclusive and culturally responsive educational system.

#11

We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education.

(i) This call to action aims to rectify the historical underfunding of Indigenous education and facilitate equitable access to post-secondary education for Indigenous students.

#12

We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.

(i) This call to action aims to develop early childhood educational programs tailored to the needs and cultural values of Indigenous communities, which historically have been excluded from the Canadian educational system.

Reconciliation Calls to Action

#62

We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- i Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade 12 students.
- ii Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
- iii Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
- iv Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

(i) This call to action aims to incorporate Indigenous history and perspectives into the Canadian curriculum and create a more culturally inclusive environment for Indigenous students and educators.

#63

We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- i Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- iv Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

(i) This call to action aims to build teachers' and students' capacity for teaching and learning about Indigenous Peoples and the legacy of residential schools.

#64

We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal elders.

(i) This call to action aims to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into the study of religion and co-create the curriculum with Indigenous elders to ensure cultural accuracy and sensitivity when teaching this topic.

#65

We call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions, to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation.

(i) This call to action aims to establish comprehensive research initiatives to better understand the complexities and nuances of the reconciliation process.

51 Government of Canada, "Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," September 2022, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525>

52 Ibid.

53 Eva Jewell and Ian Mosby, "Calls to Action Accountability: A 2023 Status Update on Reconciliation," *Yellowhead Institute*, December 2023, <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/YI-TRC-C2A-2023-Special-Report-compressed.pdf>; Education, "Government of Canada, June 2023, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524495412051/155751160222>"; "Beyond94: Truth and Reconciliation in Canada," CBC News, June 22, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/beyond-94/publish-annual-reports-on-education-funding-and-educational-and-income-attainments>

54 Laura Barnett, "The 'Spanking' Law: Section 43 of the Criminal Code," Library of Parliament, February 1, 2023 https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en_CA/ResearchPublications/201635E

Further, many studies in Canada have shown that Indigenous workers face systemic racism in the workforce; in some cases, this includes wage differences that cannot be fully explained by differences in education.⁵⁵ In fact, even for those with a post-secondary degree, unemployment rates remain disproportionately high for people who are Black, racialized, immigrants, or newcomers.⁵⁶ According to Census 2021, the unemployment rate for racialized people who are also newcomers (arrived in 2016 or later) and have post-secondary education was 10.4%; Black newcomers with university degrees had an unemployment rate of 10.8%; and Black non-immigrants with university degrees had an unemployment rate of 9.8%. Meanwhile, people in Canada who neither identify as racialized nor as immigrants and have post-secondary education had about half the unemployment rate of these groups: 5% in 2021.⁵⁷

55 Danielle Lamb and Anil Verma, "Nonstandard Employment and Indigenous Earnings Inequality in Canada," *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2021, Vol. 63, No. 5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022185621102112>

56 Statistics Canada, "Postsecondary Educational Attainment and Labour Market Outcomes among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, Findings from the 2021 Census," October 27, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2023001/article/00012-eng.htm>

57 Statistics Canada, "Labour force status by visible minority, immigrant status and period of immigration, highest level of education, age and gender: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts," 2022, Table: 98-10-0446-01.



Unemployment rates offer only a small window into labour market experiences. However, because the unemployment rate looks at the proportion of people who have been seeking and are continuing to seek work or have recently lost or left their jobs, it is one important way of assessing barriers to employment. High unemployment rates show that people are actively seeking work and are unable to find it. Improving opportunities for career mobility and career advancement can help to reduce the frictions and structural inequities that keep unemployment rates high and can prevent even more adverse outcomes, such as long-term unemployment.

Personal Experiences of Labour Market Disruption: The Lasting Impacts of COVID

Aggregate statistics can only shed so much light on individual experiences of the post-pandemic rebound. In qualitative engagements, research contributors described the lasting impacts of the pandemic on their careers. The following section describes several common threads that emerged from these conversations.

The nature of work, social capital, and networking have all changed in remote environments.

Not all sectors and occupations transitioned online during the pandemic, and many have since returned to the office—although the return to office has also changed to accommodate hybrid work alternatives. However, a significant proportion of Canadian workers are still completing most of their work hours from home. A figure that was 7.4% in May 2016 rose to 24.3% by May 2021 and still remains at 20.1% as of May 2023.⁵⁸ The full implications of this shift are yet to be fully understood. For some, this shift to remote working has been largely positive: for example, several research participants who did not drink alcohol for religious reasons commented that they felt more able to access important networking and decision-making calls, particularly during COVID when nobody was meeting outside of work. Conversely, for others, getting face time with their supervisor and building the type of relationship more likely to lead to advancement proved more difficult. A research contributor who worked in workforce development in Winnipeg noted that “the gap got wider for many [during the pandemic],” in part because of “digital connections, personal connections, for people who had to go back home but lived in remote areas.” ICTC heard similar feedback from women in mid and senior roles in the technology sector—these individuals found virtual networking opportunities key to advancement over the last few years but suggested that companies look for ways to formally institute these mechanisms to avoid potential bias stemming from inequitable face time between junior and senior staff.⁵⁹

58 René Morissette, Vincent Hardy and Voltek Zolkiewski, “Working Most Hours from Home: New Estimates for January to April 2022,” Statistics Canada: Analytica Studies Branch Research Paper Series, July 17, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2023006-eng.htm>; Statistics Canada, “Share of Workers Usually Working from Home, Canada, 2016 to 2023,” August 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230822/g-b001-eng.htm>

59 Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), 2023. “Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech’s Untapped Potential.” Ottawa ON: Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023.



Research contributors with care responsibilities also reported a wide range of impacts on their lives as a result of remote work. For some, virtual work or education made it possible for them to “do it all” while having children. A newcomer to Canada in Montreal commented, “I choose to work online... I have more time to spend with my family, my daughter. I have more time to think about myself and about my future.” A member of a rural Black-led advocacy association fought to be able to continue working from home after COVID, advocating for flexible work arrangements with their employer because it had been so beneficial for themselves and their family.

For others, particularly in regions where schools closed, the burden of conflicting responsibilities was too much to manage. A participant from St. John’s, NL, identifying as a person of colour, described struggling with a lack of “school space” in a smaller home and commented that their family was facing difficulties “sleeping, socializing, working, and doing school all from the same room” during the height of the pandemic.” Meanwhile, participants in Iqaluit described more work for Inuit women juggling the need to work from home with child and family care; some also mentioned that employers were using tools like work logs, and many viewed these tools as stemming from a lack of trust in their employees. And finally, participants in Toronto and Montreal mentioned a sense of increasing ageism in the workplace. They reported experiencing a growing digital skill gap: that is, older workers felt that they were increasingly competing against a younger, tech-savvy generation in “digital first” workplaces. For these workers, insufficient familiarity with technology or foundational digital skills made it more difficult to find work, advance in their careers, and fully participate in the labour market.

Research contributors described an increased intersection between their health and their career planning. Some found themselves pivoting to a purpose-driven career after reflecting on what their communities needed most—including going back to school to train for jobs in health, education, or social services. Many others noted health concerns compounded by the pandemic: layoffs that resulted in extended time off work created challenges for accessing health insurance, as well as mental health support. Research has associated financial instability during COVID-19 with negative mental health outcomes,⁶⁰ and many research contributors in this project expressed struggling with isolation, job and housing instability, as well as the rising cost of living and inflation. Notably, several people described balancing the need to keep their jobs with protecting the safety of immune-compromised family members and worrying for the health of their children in classroom settings in cases where they were not able to educate them at home. Furthermore, not everyone working had access to paid sick leave. Some participants reported being laid off for needing to take time off work for illness. In a focus group in Toronto, participants wrote notes on chart paper, and people added a star sticker if the note resonated with them: “Health: Mental, Physical, Emotional, Financial” received 17 stars from the group, the highest-voted comment in that session.

60

Louis-Philippe Beland, Abel Brodeur, Derek Mikola, and Taylor Wright, “The short-term economic consequences of COVID-19: Occupation tasks and mental health in Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue canadienne d’économique*, March 2022, Vol. 55, pp. 214–247, <https://doi.org/10.1111/caje.12543>



For some research participants, vaccination mandates in workplaces ended up having a negative impact on their careers—Black communities in Canada were among the least vaccinated and most adversely affected. Low rates of vaccination in this community are in part due to a lack of trust stemming from experiences of discrimination in healthcare and the lack of health literature geared to Black communities.⁶¹ Similarly, a legacy of colonialism and continued experiences of discrimination in healthcare contribute to vaccine hesitancy in Indigenous communities.⁶²

With regard to labour market impact, some research participants reported losing jobs because of vaccination status or leaving front-line jobs for fear of contracting COVID and spreading it to family. A staff member from an Indigenous workforce development organization in Alberta commented, “When I look at the labour market, they don’t know how to hire or engage Indigenous people. There is a lack of knowledge. I find that for vaccinations, employers requiring them causes a big problem, even though mandates are down. Lots of my participants don’t have vaccines, don’t trust them, and employers don’t understand that.”

In Indigenous communities outside of urban centres, a systemic lack of access to health services meant that many Nations closed off their territory as much as was feasible. Participants in this study reflected on the impact of that on workforce participation and advancement. An Indigenous business consultant in Ontario, for example, noted that “some communities were reluctant to let people go outside the communities for interviews or job searches” or go for external services like a driver’s licence exam that would aid access to certain jobs. A First Nations research contributor from the BC interior added, “In terms of those people working on reserve, there was a big impact insofar as our administration offices needed to make sure that staff and community were protected from further spread. Some people were laid off, and others were sent home to work, and of course, everyone has varying resources and degrees of comfort with working from home. COVID really did impact people’s ability to participate in labour.”

Many community-serving organizations took a hit during the pandemic. Civil society organizations and NGOs running programming that had to be in person often reported taking funding hits. A woman of colour who had been working with a charitable organization in Victoria, BC, prior to the pandemic commented, “Not being able to run programs meant not receiving funding,” which also resulted in job losses. Closures in public services such as libraries (which offer computer access to people without devices or high-speed internet, for example) impacted many research participants significantly. Many libraries offered hand sanitizer, masks, and testing strips. Workforce development organizations also reported having to limit the number of people they served at one time, resulting in long wait times. In turn, many community-serving organizations noted that transitioning to virtual services was a considerable challenge for their organization. This was also the case with K-12 schools, many of which did not have the infrastructure needed to go virtual during the pandemic.

61 Jude Mary Cénat et al., “Vaccine mistrust among Black individuals in Canada: The major role of health literacy, conspiracy theories, and racial discrimination in the healthcare system,” *Journal of Medical Virology*, 2023, Vol. 95, No. 4, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jmv.28738>

62 Margo Greenwood and Noni MacDonald, “Vaccine Mistrust: A Legacy of Colonialism,” *The Royal Society of Canada*, March 31, 2021, <https://rsc-src.ca/en/voices/vaccine-mistrust-legacy-colonialism>



Housing insecurity and inflation have perpetuated the inequitable economic fallout of the pandemic. By September 2023, the cost of groceries in Canada had risen 21% from January 2021; however, “growth in average weekly earnings over this period was [just] 7.8%.”⁶³ The cost of housing also rose significantly during this time, both in terms of mortgage interest rates and rental prices, for a 17.8% cumulative percentage change in the cost of shelter over the same time span.⁶⁴ Research collaborators reported significant impacts on their lives as a consequence of unaffordable housing, energy, and food. Food security was a particular challenge for remote Indigenous communities. A First Nations leader and research contributor in Newfoundland described a situation where programs that had been providing services to vulnerable people lost funding or staff, and community members needed to undertake activities, including food drives to ensure that people vulnerable to COVID, such as Elders, would not need to leave their residences. In Iqaluit, Inuk participants noted that some communities experienced forced resettlement only to be left with insufficient housing and food security—several characterized this as systemic racism.

“ Food costs. A bottle of Gatorade down south is what, three dollars? Up here, it’s over five. Costs were only getting higher during COVID. We had a boil water advisory, and one of the managers at the [local grocery store] put the prices up. ”

In Toronto, participants who reported living in urban food deserts (“geographic spaces, typically in urban settings, where residents have limited or no access to healthy food options with sufficient variety at an affordable cost”⁶⁵) echoed similar concerns: lack of access to nutritional food, increased housing prices, and the high cost of internet were all core challenges to meaningful participation in the labour market. In fact, limited access to services, coupled with the increased cost of living, have housing and nutrition so precarious that several participants reported experiencing homelessness for the first time at the onset of COVID; some have not been able to regain their previous lives or start again in a new field of work.



TRIGGER WARNING

The following subsection (two paragraphs) contains references to events that some readers may find distressing.

The pandemic coincided with events that shone a light on ongoing systemic racism in Canada and North America. During 2021, greater attention than ever was drawn to the impact of residential schools on Indigenous Peoples. In the first half of 2021, the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation uncovered the graves of children buried at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. Subsequently, various Nations across Canada have uncovered over a thousand similarly unmarked graves at former school sites.⁶⁶ Bringing these horrifying events to light was a process that rightly occupied significant media attention, and some EDI specialists experienced a renewed commitment to Truth and Reconciliation on the part of many Canadian organizations and employers.

63 “Research to Insights: Perspectives on growth, inflation and affordability,” Statistics Canada, November 16, 2023, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2023007-eng.htm?utm_source=lnkn&utm_medium=smo&utm_campaign=statcan-statcan-film-mlf-23-24

64 Ibid.

65 Natalie Armstrong, Alison Lumby, and Andria Sallese, “Food Deserts,” The Ontario Association of Landscape Architects, accessed December 21, 2023, <https://www.oala.ca/ground-59-food-deserts>

66 Rachel Gilmore, “Mapping the missing: Former residential school sites in Canada and the search for unmarked graves,” Global News, Sept 15, 2021, <https://globalnews.ca/news/8074453/indigenous-residential-schools-canada-graves-map/>



Research contributors also noted that many organizations struggled with how to turn their desire to help into action. Many counselled that a declaration of intent to hire wasn't enough, that "aesthetic diversity" or tokenism could inadvertently cause harm to relevant employees, and that it was important to hire and promote Indigenous and racialized leaders and board members into roles with the power to make organizational change. A First Nations research contributor in Edmonton with experience in anti-racism policy development commented, "Despite the focus on Truth and Reconciliation today, racism is more than alive."

Furthermore, some interviewees reported seeing an impact on employers' commitment to anti-racism following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. Despite this, they still cautioned against temporary fixes. A research contributor from an immigration policy consulting team saw "an overall desire among employers to do better to advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace... Of course, we will see whether that effect lasts and whether that also applies to all kinds of jobs." An equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) specialist in Ontario saw "so many different businesses and different organizations come out in support of BLM [Black Lives Matter], posting the Black Square, all those things. But then you look at some of the things they were doing, and you look at some of the boards and these bigger issues, and there's zero diversity... You can't just be performative about it." A newcomer to Canada (Ontario), commented, "EDI was so popular ever since 2020, after George Floyd. But then, in the last year, things have started to slow down... When something triggers them [organizations] to act, we need to have a continuation of those programs... [and] a platform that makes them accountable." Accordingly, while events coinciding with the pandemic caused a sharp realization on behalf of some employers about long-term systemic racism, interviewees called for these organizations to think about adopting lasting change.

Talent Demand in the Canadian Workforce: The Post-Pandemic Landscape at a Glance

Canada's unemployment rate peaked at 13.7% in May 2020.⁶⁷ Comparatively, for the previous decade, the national unemployment rate averaged 6.7%.⁶⁸ Since then, the unemployment rate has recovered to below pre-pandemic levels, seeing 5.2% in October 2022 and 5.7% in October 2023.⁶⁹ However, several sectors continue to experience the impact of a tight labour market, including high vacancy rates that are difficult to fill. Sectors more impacted by labour shortages include accommodation and food services, healthcare and social assistance, and construction.⁷⁰ The healthcare sector has seen a "year-over-year increase in full- and part-time unfilled positions," with a particularly acute shortage of nurses.⁷¹

67 Statistics Canada, "The Daily – Labour Force Survey, December 2020," January 8, 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210108/dq210108a-eng.htm>

68 Taken as a monthly average of the federal unemployment rate between January 2011 and February 2020. Data from Statistics Canada, "The Daily – Labour Force Survey, December 2020," January 8, 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210108/cg-a004-eng.htm>

69 Statistics Canada, "Labour Force Characteristics by Province, Monthly, Seasonally Adjusted," June 27, 2018, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410028703>

70 Statistics Canada, "Job Vacancies and Job Vacancy Rate, Adjusted for Seasonality," July 27, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230727/t003a-eng.htm>

71 Statistics Canada, "The Daily – Job Vacancies, Second Quarter 2023," September 19, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230919/dq230919b-eng.htm>



Research participants shared their own experiences in these sectors. For example, an interviewee in Ottawa commented:

“ The hospitality and tourism industry in the Ottawa region is under serious labour shortages... We've lost a large swath of full-time employees that had been working for many years in the industry. They got laid off through the pandemic and found different positions... Some hotels will have 30% of their inventory rooms not even open. It doesn't matter whether people want to rent them or not. It's just that they can't afford to clean them. They can't afford to have someone clean them and be ready on time. ”

Meanwhile, many participants working in healthcare described conditions of burnout (long hours, public pressure, exposure to illness). Others, namely newcomers to Canada, described difficulty in having their internationally earned credentials recognized. These challenges will be discussed in more depth in Parts II and III.

While some sectors experienced a more acute talent crunch than others, ultimately, until recently, significant labour shortages were prevalent across the entire economy. In the ICTC employer survey, 54% of respondents reported insufficient supply for in-demand positions. This was particularly true for large employers (500+ employees), 62% of whom were facing staffing challenges. Some of the employers facing staffing challenges listed mid- and senior-level roles with domain expertise as particularly in demand; occupational groups with the highest demand were IT personnel and supervisors/managers. Skill-wise, employers most frequently sought workers with strong teamwork and collaboration skills.

HOW LIKELY IS YOUR ORGANIZATION TO DO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING TO ADDRESS THE STAFFING CHALLENGES?

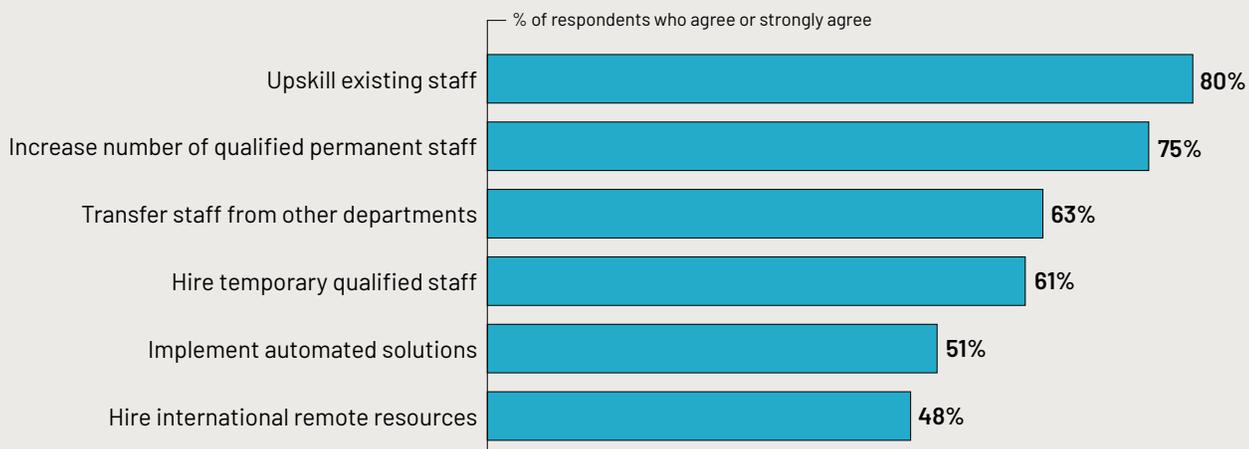


Figure 2: Strategies for addressing staffing challenges, ICTC Employer Survey



When asked how likely their organization was to hire temporary qualified staff, hire internationally, increase the number of permanent staff, upskill or reskill existing staff, or implement efficient technologies in order to address their staffing challenges, employers were more likely to want to upskill existing staff than reskill staff from other departments or hire anew. Interestingly, younger managers (18–34 years of age) were most likely to agree that they might implement automated solutions or hire international remote staff. Meanwhile, managers 35–44 were most open to reskilling or upskilling existing personnel.

The quarterly Canadian Survey of Business Conditions shows that **recruiting** and **retaining** skilled employees, as well as a general labour force shortage, are three of the six top obstacles faced by Canadian businesses currently. Figure 3 is a heatmap showing the % of survey respondents who selected each item as a key obstacle facing their business in the upcoming quarter. While labour-related concerns were most salient in 2022, these obstacles remain important for respondents in Q4 of 2023.

BUSINESS OBSTACLES OVER THE NEXT 3 MONTHS

	Q1 2021	Q2 2021	Q3 2021	Q4 2021	Q1 2022	Q2 2022	Q3 2022	Q4 2022	Q1 2023	Q2 2023	Q3 2023	Q4 2023	AVG
Rising cost of inputs	26.2	39.1	39.9	43.7	51.7	50.9	48.5	49.5	46.7	41.1	45.8	45.5	44.1
Recruiting skilled employees	23.7	27.8	34.6	35.2	38.6	36.7	38.6	36.4	33.6	35.5	33.4	29.0	33.6
Transportation costs	n.d.	23.9	24.0	32.6	36.2	40.6	39.7	38.6	34.0	31.7	30.9	30.0	32.9
Cost of insurance	20.3	26.4	25.6	32.0	36.1	33.1	31.9	32.1	33.6	32.3	35.4	34.5	31.1
Shortage of labour force	19.5	24.1	30.8	32.7	37.5	35.3	37.1	35.8	30.4	30.9	30.3	25.7	30.8
Retaining skilled employees	23.7	22.0	24.5	25.6	30.3	27.3	30.7	26.4	24.5	26.9	26	23.2	25.9
Fluctuations in consumer demand	32.7	27.4	23.3	22.1	24.2	20.7	18.6	22.7	20.8	22.5	22.4	22.7	23.3
Attracting new or returning customers	n.d.	28.0	22.0	20.7	23.0	20.6	16.7	18.5	19.1	20.4	20.4	20.5	20.9
Maintaining sufficient cash flow or managing debt	25.0	22.6	18.3	20.0	22.9	19.3	19.3	19.7	19.6	20.0	22.9	20.3	20.8
Increasing competition	19.9	17.6	18.5	18.5	20.9	19.6	17.1	18.4	17.5	20.5	20.1	19.3	19.0
Difficulty acquiring inputs, products or supplies from abroad	n.d.	11.9	15.8	18.5	19.1	19.1	28.0	24.7	21.4	17.1	14.3	13.3	18.5
Difficulty acquiring inputs, products or supplies domestically	n.d.	23.2	23.6	28.7	33.9	29.3	15.3	13.1	9.9	8.3	7.2	5.8	18.0
Obstacles for the business or organization, none	17.7	15.8	20.7	18.2	16.0	17.7	12.7	16.3	16.5	16.7	15.1	16.9	16.7
Insufficient demand for goods or services offered	30.1	19.9	14.5	15.3	16.5	11.8	10.9	13.6	13.0	12.8	14.4	17.1	15.8
Maintaining inventory levels	14.0	14.3	16.9	19.5	22.1	18.2	15.0	13.6	10.6	11.1	8.7	8.4	14.4
Obtaining financing	10.4	12.6	9.3	10.7	11.5	10.9	9.0	11.4	11.6	13.4	13.9	13.9	11.6
Shortage of space or equipment	5.2	6.1	7.6	8.5	9.8	9.5	8.0	8.1	6.8	6.9	7.1	7.4	7.6
Challenges related to exporting goods and services	3.6	3.3	2.7	2.9	3.3	2.8	2.0	3.0	1.9	1.8	1.9	2.6	2.7

Figure 3: Data Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Business Conditions (CSBC) 2021-2023. Analysis, ICTC. Note: n.d. reflects poor data quality or a parameter not included in the survey questionnaire that quarter. In Q1 2021, additionally, recruiting and retaining skilled employees were bundled into one double-barrelled question and then subsequently separated. Accordingly, for Q1 2021, those two barriers show the same value.



Another way to examine job demand is through job postings. For example, the Future Skills Centre reported seeing 464,000 fewer jobs posted than usual between 2019 and 2020, followed by a rebound of 422,000 from 2020 to 2021 and a further gain of 654,000 between 2021 and 2022.⁷² For this project, ICTC collected and analyzed over 2 million job postings between April 2022 and October 2023; this exercise allowed ICTC to assess the types of jobs that are in demand in Canada, where they are located and most prevalent, what the work conditions of those jobs are (including remote, hybrid, or on-site), and the skill profile (including technical and human skills) sought to fill them. The details of these jobs are included on ICTC's eTalent platform,⁷³ showcasing jobs per city, growth over time, and skill pathways. As one example, for manager-level roles collected over the past year, the biggest sectors of opportunity in Canada include retail, healthcare, financial services, professional services, and public administration.

Ultimately, it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on both workers and businesses in Canada. While job vacancy rates decreased in 2023, reducing pressure on a still-tight labour market, employers continue to anticipate challenges in finding skilled and qualified workers.⁷⁴ Diversity of experience, particularly in mid- and senior-level roles, is also increasingly seen as something that strengthens organizations. The past few years have indicated an increase in awareness among employers regarding the benefits of hiring and promoting more Black, Indigenous, and racialized personnel, including to boards and into leadership positions. In a review of the literature on diversity's economic impact, the OECD outlines a positive association between diversity in post-secondary graduates (measured by nationality or place of birth) and innovation (patent applications and grants) in the United States and Europe.⁷⁵ In the technology ecosystem, research has identified that the inclusion of people with diverse lived experiences can help companies be more innovative, including incorporating measures for responsible innovation, such as safety by design.⁷⁶ Other research has suggested that collaboration among diverse teams is even associated with better investment decision-making.⁷⁷ Together, firms without the right strategies to engage newcomers, women, and racialized candidates will, as the OECD puts it, "increasingly feel the cost of discriminatory behaviour in the context of growing labour market shortages."⁷⁸

Workforce development and EDI strategists interviewed for this study commented that many employers committed to diverse hiring had complementary business and moral reasons, including commitments to reconciliation. A Manitoban career development professional described working with an employer in the banking industry who wanted to build community connections and hire more Indigenous personnel.

72 TMU Diversity Institute, "Recovery of Canada's Labour Market After the COVID-19 Pandemic," Future Skills Centre, August 21, 2023, <https://fsc-ccf.ca/recovery-of-canadas-labour-market/>

73 "eTalent Canada," Information and Communications Technology Council, n.d., accessed January 8, 2023, <https://etalentcanada.ca/>

74 Statistics Canada, "Research to Insights: Perspectives on Growth, Inflation and Affordability," November 16, 2023, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2023007-eng.htm?utm_source=lnkn&utm_medium=smo&utm_campaign=statcan-statcan-film-mlf-23-24

75 OECD, "Chapter 2. The Impact of Diversity: A Review of the Evidence," *All Hands In? Making Diversity Work for All*, September 2020, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/5f8c1531-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5f8c1531-en>

76 Mairead Matthews et al., *Responsible Innovation in Canada and Beyond: Understanding and Improving the Social Impacts of Technology*, Information and Communications Technology Council, January 2021, <https://www.digitalthinktankictc.com/reports/responsible-innovation-in-canada-and-beyond>

77 Paul Gompers and Silpa Kovvali, "The Other Diversity Dividend," *Harvard Business Review*, July 1, 2018, <https://hbr.org/2018/07/the-other-diversity-dividend>

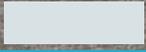
78 OECD, "Chapter 2. The Impact of Diversity: A Review of the Evidence," *All Hands In? Making Diversity Work for All*, September 2020, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/5f8c1531-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5f8c1531-en>



Reconciliation and a commitment to TRC Call to Action #92 for workplaces were the primary drivers of this business strategy, but the employer also viewed it as a financial opportunity. That is, they saw “more and more Indigenous people in the middle class” and believed a hiring strategy that prioritized Indigenous candidates was one way to access a new or untapped market.

Many racialized, and newcomer- or immigrant-led organizations that participated in this study offered services to companies who wanted to hire more equitably but didn’t know where to start. These interviewees commented that they saw a lot of good intentions on the part of employers but often also an inadequate understanding of strategies (development and implementation) for supporting mobility, advancement, and retention. To fill this gap, the following sections focus on strategies for employers, educational institutions, and civil society to support career agency, including equitable career advancement, mobility, and “innovative hazard”—productive career risk-taking supported by adequate social safety nets.





PART II

Career Mobility & Transition





A newcomer to Edmonton, AB, was working in IT desktop support when they first came to Canada but found that they “could barely sustain [their] family with the IT income.” The pandemic was disruptive: their IT work had required them to be on site, supporting users and maintaining digital infrastructure. They saw an opportunity to transition to a different field in IT where they could “work from any location,” and they took courses in data analysis and transitioned to a role as a “data analyst and business intelligence developer.”

They said, “For anyone who wants to transition, the first thing is to be resilient and decisive. Then, you have to have an end goal in sight and pay your dues. And next is to have enough commitment to follow through and manage your time to study.”

Career mobility is the ability to change roles or occupations within an organization or between organizations.⁷⁹ Some organizations also use the term “career mobility” or “labour mobility” to mean geographical mobility: moving between cities, provinces, or countries for a job opportunity. While many of this study’s research participants have done so, this is not the type of career mobility being discussed in this paper unless it co-occurs with a change in careers.

People switch jobs, occupations, and even industries for a wide variety of reasons. Some theories of career mobility emphasize economic motivation and an individual’s cost-benefit analysis as the primary reason for a person to change careers.⁸⁰ Under these models, workers may be scanning the employment landscape to understand where their skills, ambitions, and values would be best put to use and making necessary plans to shape skills and credentials that will allow them to actualize this. Importantly, career changes are not always economic: many people shape their careers and skill-building choices around a desire to help others, an “equity ethic.”⁸¹ Whether for economic or social causes, one aspect of career mobility is a person’s agency in shaping their career and moving fluidly between roles.

79 In this study, the term “career mobility” was not always clear and accessible for research participants, so the research term asked about “transitions,” “career reinvention,” decisions about learning new skills, and which skills participants felt were transferable between roles.
80 Fuda Li et al., “Impact of Occupational Risks of Medical Staff on Willingness to Occupational Mobility in COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Risk Management Healthcare Policy*, 2022, vol. 15, pp. 685-702, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9022743/>
81 Ebony McGee and Lydia Bentley, “The Equity Ethic: Black and Latinx College Students Reengineering Their STEM Careers toward Justice,” *American Journal of Education* vol. 14, no. 1, 2017. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/693954>



Career mobility is not just about individual choice, however. Managers and organizations make decisions about how much they invest in employee skill development, how much internal mobility they permit, and how open they are to hiring career transitioners.⁸² At a more systemic level, labour market segmentation (LMS) theory suggests that some sectors or occupations are divided in a way that makes it very challenging for people to cross over from one to another.⁸³ For example, occupations with few barriers to entry may not invest in employee skill building and may feature high turnover and low wages, making it difficult for workers in these situations to take the time to invest in new skills and experiences. Furthermore, research has suggested that labour market segmentation is a significant contributor to earnings disparities for newcomers and immigrants to Canada,⁸⁴ Indigenous Peoples,⁸⁵ and Black workers in Canada.⁸⁶ For example, Indigenous Peoples are more likely to be employed in casual or temporary employment contracts, a type of work highly impacted by labour market shocks such as the pandemic.

Career mobility is important insurance for workers whose roles are threatened by automation or displacement, who are working at a below-living wage, or who are seeking recognition for international credentials. COVID-19 is not the only labour market disruption likely to occur in the 21st century: technological change can also contribute to increases in economic inequality, and research in Canada has suggested that certain sectors are more vulnerable to automation, including accommodation and food services, retail, construction, transportation and warehousing, and administration and management.⁸⁷ Several analyses have concluded that Black and Indigenous workers in Canada are the most likely to hold roles at risk of automation.⁸⁸ In the ICTC employer survey, respondents were asked to name technologies they had implemented that had improved efficiencies in their businesses since the pandemic began. Many named remote work and remote communications. A smaller number described automating particular tasks, implementing new software, or introducing the process of production improvements. (Importantly, the employer survey took place prior to November 2022's launch of many publicly available generative AI tools.) Furthermore, 81% of respondents felt that in the long term, efficient technologies would replace certain tasks, and 74% felt that they would replace certain jobs. Meanwhile, 76% of respondents agreed that efficient technologies had already replaced certain tasks, and 68% felt they had already replaced certain jobs.⁸⁹

82 Anneleen Forrier, Luc Sels, & Dave Stynen, "Career mobility at the intersection between agent and structure: A conceptual model," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 2009, vol. 82, no. 4, pp. 739-759.

83 Sita Jayaraman & Harald Bauder, "Niche Employment or Occupational Segmentation? Immigrant Women Working in the Settlement Sector in Germany and Canada," *Ryerson Centre for immigration and Settlement Working Paper No. 2014/3*, March 2013, https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/centre-for-immigration-and-settlement/tmcis/publications/workingpapers/2014_3_Jayaraman_Sita_Bauder_Harald_Niche_Employment_or_Occupational_Segmentation_Immigrant_Women_Working_in_the_Settlement_Sector_in_Germany_and_Canada.pdf/

84 Danielle Lamb and Anil Verma, "Nonstandard Employment and Indigenous Earnings Inequality in Canada," *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 63, no. 5, June 8, 2021. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00221856211021128>

85 Ibid.

86 Gervan Fearon and Steven Wald, "The Earnings Gap between Black and White Workers in Canada: Evidence from the 2006 Census," *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*, Vol. 66, No. 3, 2011, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1937892>

87 "Digital Differences: The impact of automation on the Indigenous economy in Canada," Ted Rogers School of Management, Diversity Institute, Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, and Future Skills, July 2020. <https://fsc-ccf.ca/research/digital-differences-the-impact-of-automation-on-the-indigenous-economy-in-canada/>

88 Ibid.; Rosalie Wynoch, "The Next Wave: Automation and Canada's Labour Market," C.D. Howe Institute, November 2020, https://www.cdhowe.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Commentary_585_0.pdf

89 Note: ICTC used the phrase "efficient technologies" to try to elicit an honest reply and avoid potential stigma or self-censorship attached to the term "automation."



Despite the importance of career mobility, taking the time to develop transferable skills or explore new job and career options is also an expensive risk. Governments, civil society, and educational institutions play essential roles in creating safety nets and accessible opportunities for skill development in service of career mobility. When not accompanied by social safety nets allowing career transitioners to reskill and make intentional changes, moves may be “disadvantageous both in terms of objective career success (e.g., when being stationed on a career plateau) or subjective career success (e.g., when endangering one’s highly valued work/life balance or hindering the promotion one dreamt of).”⁹⁰

As addressed in this paper’s introduction, the COVID-19 pandemic saw an unprecedented number of layoffs in precarious roles, impacting each of these communities. It also saw unique programs such as the Government of Canada’s Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), which may have provided a safety net for career transitions for those interested in it. Accordingly, **Part II: Career Mobility** begins with a synthesis of key “push” and “pull” factors that drove career changes for equity-deserving participants in this study. Then, it turns to the barriers participants still faced in building and leveraging transferable skills to move between roles and occupations. Finally, Part II turns to solutions, asking what managers, workplaces, educational institutions, and policymakers can do to improve access to career mobility.

The “Great Resignation” in the US and in Canada: Career Transition Decision-Making

In 2021, labour market data in the United States showed a trend that was quickly coined “the Great Resignation.” The country began experiencing an unusually high number of voluntary resignations, and researchers have suggested a number of causes for this: employees who got used to working from home did not want to return to the office when organizational policy changed, personal stress and loss of social interactions deteriorated mental health and bumped intentions to quit, or workers had time to consider whether they found their careers rewarding during lockdowns.⁹¹ In the US, the great resignation was not experienced uniformly across the population. For example, one study found that there was a greater decline in hours worked (between 2019 and 2022) among men than women and that among men, “the decline was larger for those with a bachelor’s degree than those with less education, for prime-age workers than older workers, and also for those who already worked long hours and had high earnings.”⁹²

Meanwhile, in Canada, there was debate about whether a “great resignation” occurred at all. Canadian labour force participation remained relatively steady after Canadians returned to work following the initial spike in unemployment caused by COVID-19.

90 Anneleen Forrier, Luc Sels, & Dave Stynen, “Career mobility at the intersection between agent and structure: A conceptual model,” *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 2009, vol. 82, no. 4, pp. 739-759.

91 Mussie Tessema et al., “The ‘Great Resignation’: Causes, Consequences, and Creative HR Management Strategies,” *Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, March 2022. <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation.aspx?paperid=116228>

92 Dain Lee, Jinhyeok Park, and Yongseok Shin, “Where Are the Workers? From Great Resignation to Quiet Quitting,” *National Bureau of Economic Research*, January 2023, <https://doi.org/10.3386/w30833>

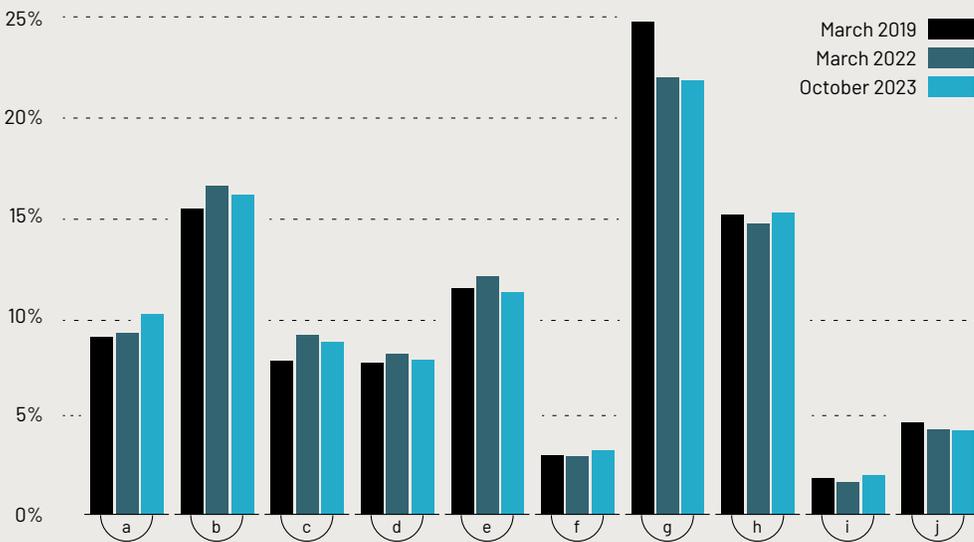


However, some analyses have shown that many workers shifted sectors: in September 2021, food and accommodation “still employed 180,000 fewer workers than it did pre-pandemic,”⁹³ whereas the number of Canadian workers in professional, scientific, and technical sectors increased. The job-change rate (“the proportion of workers who remain employed from one month to the next but who change jobs between months”) peaked at 0.8% in January 2022 but was an average of 0.7% from 2017 to 2019.⁹⁴ Furthermore, a survey of 1,500 recipients of income replacement during COVID found that more than a third of respondents experienced career-related changes upon workplace re-entry, either responsibilities (37%), employers (35%), positions (31%), or industries (30%).⁹⁵ And finally, measures of mental health and wellness for Canadian workers have shown that many are open to new opportunities or contemplating changing jobs.⁹⁶

Occupational Shift: Change in Occupation Distribution for Indigenous Peoples, Black, and Racialized Communities in the Post-Pandemic Recovery

Occupational shift is difficult to measure because Canada’s labour force survey follows each respondent only for six months: labour force survey tables represent aggregate trends rather than individual stories of moving from one job to another. However, the following three tables use labour force survey data for respondents identifying as Black, Indigenous, and racialized to examine whether there was an aggregate change in types of occupations over the past several years.

CHANGE IN INDIGENOUS OCCUPATION DISTRIBUTION



NOC OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS:

- a Legislative and senior management occupations
- b Business, finance and administration occupations
- c Natural and applied sciences and related occupations
- d Health occupations
- e Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services
- f Occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport
- g Sales and service occupations
- h Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations
- i Natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations
- j Occupations in manufacturing and utilities

Figure 4: Change in the occupation distribution of Indigenous workers before and after COVID-19. Data source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey. Note: Data quality is such that disaggregation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit respondents is not possible.

93 David MacDonald, “Tipping Point: Pandemic Forced Restaurant and Bar Workers into Better Paying Jobs,” *The Monitor*, October 13, 2021, <https://monitormag.ca/articles/tipping-point-pandemic-forced-restaurant-and-bar-workers-into-better-paying-jobs-2/>.

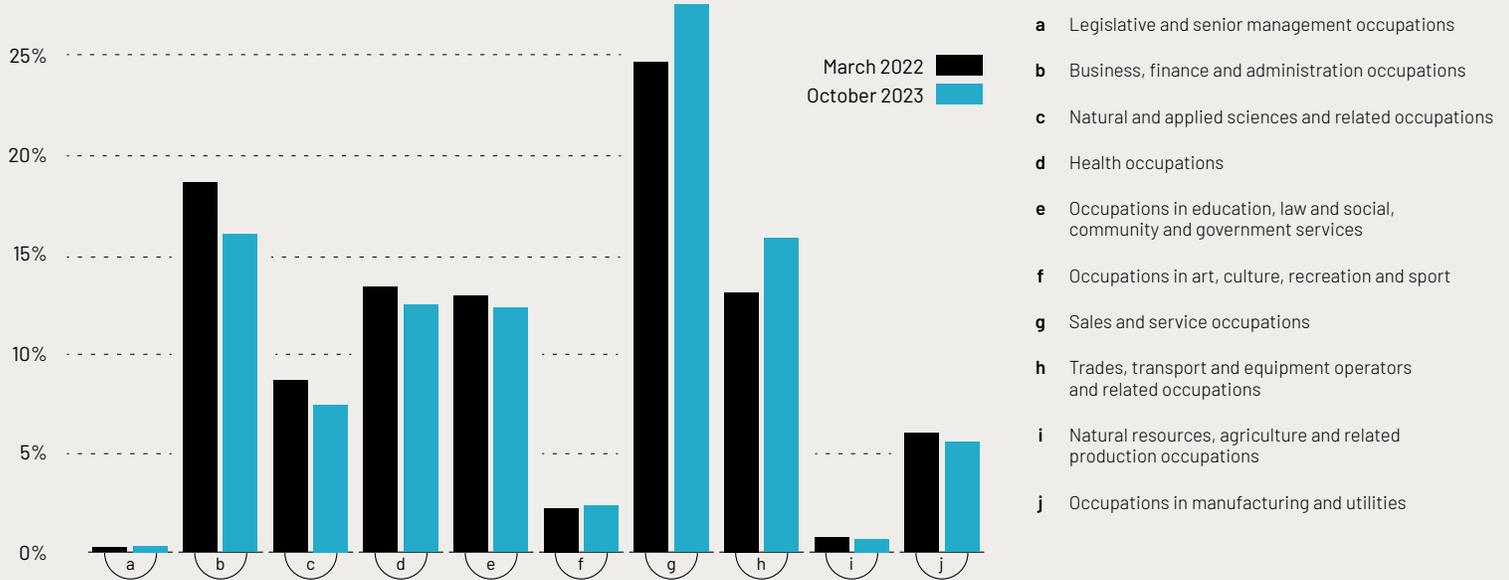
94 Statistics Canada, “The Daily – Labour Force Survey, August 2023,” September 8, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230908/dq230908a-eng.htm>.

95 Katherine Scott and Trish Hennessy, “Canada Emergency Response Benefit: More than Just an Income Program,” *Future Skills Centre & Centre for Policy Alternatives*, June 2023, p. 21 https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2023/06/CERB_Final_June%2012%2C%202023.pdf

96 Grace McGrener, “The Great Resignation & Canadian Workers,” *The Leveller*, February 1, 2022, <https://leveller.ca/2022/02/the-great-resignation-in-canada/>; “The Mental Health Index by LifeWorks,” *Lifeworks*, September 2021, https://9258156.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/9258156/MHI%202021/Canada_MHI_September2021_English_Final.pdf

From before the pandemic (March 2019) to after (March 2022), many Indigenous workers left occupations in sales and services (6). Proportionally, occupations in business, finance, and administration (1), natural and applied sciences (2), health (3), and education (4) saw an uptick. Data at the NOC level could not be disaggregated into First Nations, Inuit, and Métis identities.

CHANGE IN BLACK CANADIAN OCCUPATION DISTRIBUTION



NOC OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS:

- a Legislative and senior management occupations
- b Business, finance and administration occupations
- c Natural and applied sciences and related occupations
- d Health occupations
- e Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services
- f Occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport
- g Sales and service occupations
- h Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations
- i Natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations
- j Occupations in manufacturing and utilities

Figure 5: Change in the occupation distribution of Black workers following the start of COVID-19. Data source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey. Note: Data for Indigenous LFS respondents is available for 2019 but not for Black and racialized communities. Accordingly, this table shows trends only for the last two years.

Between March 2022 and October 2023, aggregate trends in Figure 6 show a proportionate rise in sales and services occupations (6) and trades and transport occupations (7). Because 2019 data is not available, this may or may not reflect people who were laid off from these sectors in 2020 returning to their previous jobs.



CHANGE IN RACIALIZED CANADIAN OCCUPATION DISTRIBUTION

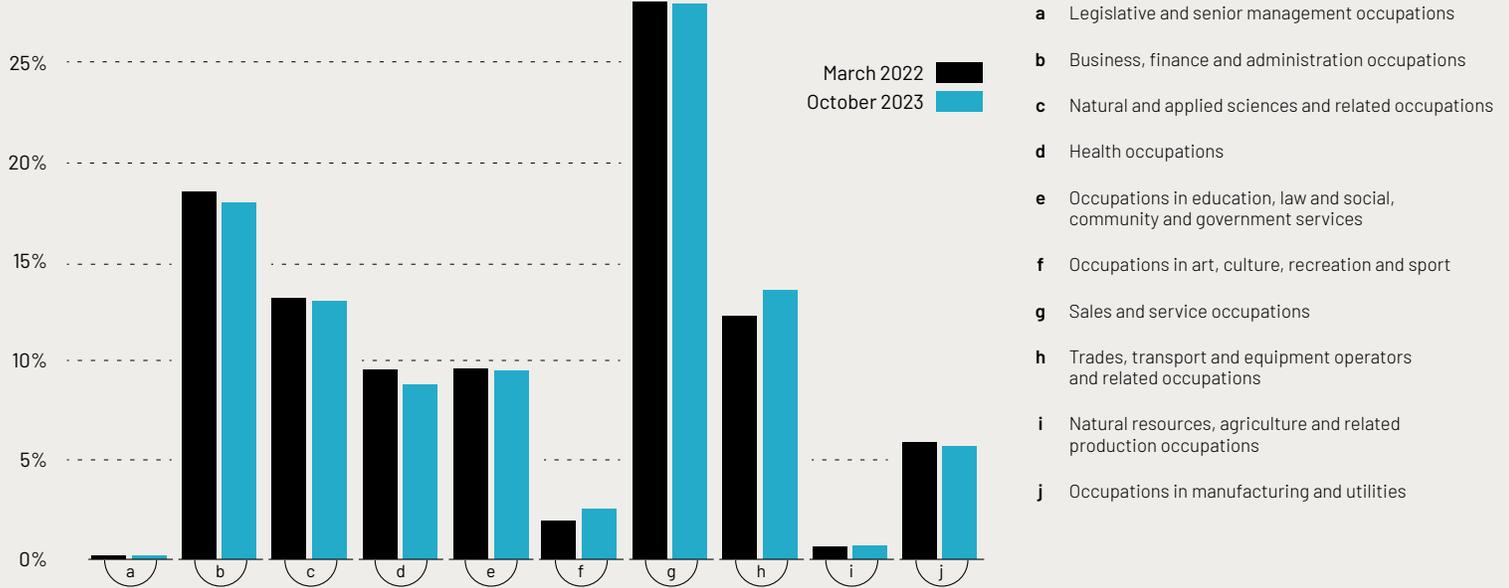


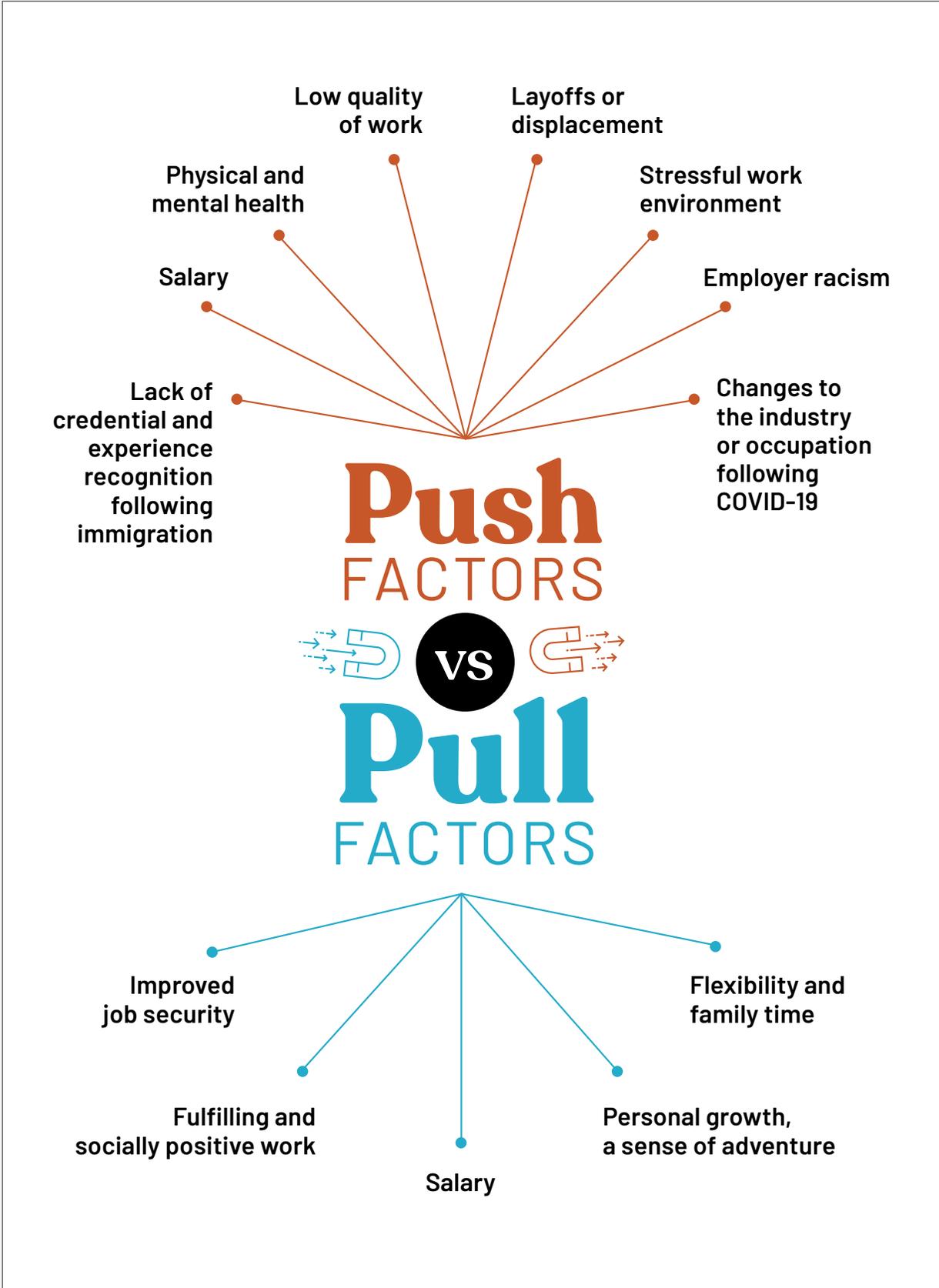
Figure 6: Change in the occupation distribution of racialized workers following the start of COVID-19. Data source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey. Note: Data for Indigenous LFS respondents is available for 2019 but not for Black and racialized communities. Accordingly, this table shows trends only for the last two years.

Between March 2022 and October 2023, aggregate trends show fewer changes for racialized workers as a whole. As with Black workers, there may be a post-pandemic return to trades and transport occupations (NOC group 7).

Accordingly, there is some evidence that sectoral “churn” extended to Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities. However, each table also shows a return to roles in sales, services, and transport—many of which were initially subject to pandemic closures.

In this study, ICTC asked research participants about their careers over the last few years and whether they had experienced transitions. If they had, we asked why. Participants shared two key types of motivators for changing their occupations: things driving them out of particular roles or fields and things attracting them *into* a particular role or field. Push and pull factors can feed into individual cost-benefit analyses. For example, we might consider whether a potential job’s flexible hours are outweighed by its lack of security and make our decision accordingly. However, push and pull factors also reflect systemic challenges for many labour market participants. For example, many research participants were “pushed” into a new career when they couldn’t find an employer who would recognize their international credentials in Canada and value the experiences and diversity these individuals brought with them as employees.

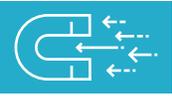




Reasons to Change Careers

Pull Factors

The following set of reasons to join a new job reflects qualitative themes emerging from participant conversations: order does not reflect the importance or frequency of response.



Improved Job Security

A research contributor identifying as a person of colour and working as a security guard in Saskatchewan sees tech as “the only growing market nowadays. Every other market seems to either go down or stagnate, or people are fighting for more rights, be it healthcare, be it agriculture.” They had made that observation prior to COVID, but the pandemic “emboldened the decision” because it showed them that their other two jobs were volatile. They added: “I don’t want to be tied down to a career or job site that can go under, and I’m left in the dust. I want to be able to quickly adapt to my situation if another pandemic comes again.”



Salary

A First Nations research contributor in Regina started studying business because they “want to create a good future for [their daughter]” as a single-income parent. Switching to a career in business seemed like a financially wise choice.



Personal Growth, a Sense of Adventure

A newcomer and lifelong learner in Ottawa was working in hospitality for 12 years and enjoyed it, but “it came time that I said, ‘I need a break, I need to do something different, I’m 30 now...’ I said, ‘Hey, you’re enjoying your job. You have 12 years in this company, but you can do better, right? You can grow faster.’ And the only way to do that is to gain experience outside of your home.” When they came to Canada, they continued their studies in hospitality by taking a management program.



Fulfilling and Socially Positive Work

A Nigerian-Canadian research contributor talked about leaving a successful career in health insurance customer service to take training in early childhood education. They love being around children and working with children, and they are thinking about opening their own daycare.



Flexibility and Family Time

A First Nations mid-career student in Saskatchewan told the research team that she has children and wants to be able to spend more time with them, so she has gone back to school for teacher training to be able to have the same summer schedule as her kids. At the same time, she would like to work in a fulfilling job that promotes the Cree language and is “more centred around Indigenous culture.”



Reasons to Change Careers

Push Factors

The following set of reasons to join a new job reflects qualitative themes emerging from participant conversations: order does not reflect the importance or frequency of response.



Low Quality of Work

A Nigerian-Canadian newcomer to Manitoba worked in a call centre and didn't enjoy having to listen to complaints all day. "I was always a positive, upbeat person." They transitioned to financial services in a role "low on the ladder" for about a year and then secured a job working in financial services with the federal government, leveraging their work in finance and customer service.



Salary

A person of colour and newcomer to Regina was working 14-hour shifts for a construction company but not getting paid what they needed. They transitioned to a role with CP Rail because of a higher salary and an interest in trains.



Layoffs or Displacement

An Indigenous entrepreneur in Ontario reported being laid off for being sick for too many days during COVID. They've since transitioned to starting their own apparel business.



Lack of Credential and Experience Recognition Following Immigration

A research contributor on the Atlantic coast had over 15 years of experience as an administrative assistant in her home country and arrived under the Atlantic provinces pilot program. In Canada, work has been very unsteady, and she has received few callbacks from employers and is instead relying on temp agencies. She is considering opening a restaurant or café and has enrolled in a pastry school, but she is worried about the startup costs of opening a business and isn't yet sure what the future holds.



Stressful Work Environment

One research contributor is an Indigenous employment professional who found their work environment particularly stressful during COVID due to a lack of support from management in the face of client biases. Many of their colleagues had left "for something better" during the pandemic.





Employer Racism

An Indigenous worker in Alberta relayed being laid off from a customer service role after reporting in sick for one shift. They felt the layoff was racially motivated because the employer had said they were surprised to learn they were Indigenous on their second shift. Another participant at the same focus group session noted that speaking up about wrongful termination could be really scary in contexts where something is related to racism.



Changes to the Industry or Occupation Following COVID-19

An Indigenous woman in Saskatchewan was working in elder care but found it very depressing during COVID because of the way the long-term care environment changed and the rules put in to limit interactions. She decided to go back to school to transition to early childhood education. However, she felt grateful for the change in the end. "People get so comfortable in the jobs that they have. It's crazy because I probably would have still been there. I would say try new things and explore your options, so you're not stuck at a job where you're miserable... I just feel good coming to school every day, and it feels like a good positive way to start your day."



Physical and Mental Health (Self or Family)

A focus group participant in Toronto commented, "Following lockdowns, I had anxieties coming up. The idea of going out and socializing was scary. In the last two years, I learned to create ways to make money. I'm a coach, so I started giving online classes, which I could do from home. I got a chance to rediscover myself and my passions and reassess my goals. I learned to be more proactive in my career."

In short, we see a wide range of overlapping factors incentivizing people to change careers. However, a lot of changes remain driven by necessity. Furthermore, in the subsequent section, we'll see that many research participants experienced barriers to making a career change.



Career Mobility: Barriers and Strategies

Most people switch jobs several times throughout their careers. In a Canadian study that followed workers from 1989 to 2018, on average, people worked for about seven different employers over the course of 30 years.⁹⁷ Making a significant career realignment or departure from a sector, however, can be risky: it may require retraining, a drop in salary, or a period of unemployment. Research participants voiced concern about the risk of changing careers throughout this study:

An Ontario EDI specialist commented, “There is the fear of instability. If you’re in a job that offers benefits, that offers a good enough salary such that you’re able to pay your bills and take care of your family... why would you risk it and fear that if you leave, you might not be able to get a job at the same level? You might have to be dropped down.” They went on to note that they felt this risk might be more salient for racialized workers and women, in particular—that moving jobs meant losing the social capital they had built over time in an organization. In the same way, they commented, not everyone has the security and intergenerational wealth to pursue unpaid internships, volunteer roles, or other traditional ways to gain work experience and a network in a new field.

An Indigenous workforce development professional in Alberta characterized risk specifically in terms of making a move from a reserve to a city in pursuit of a new job opportunity. They discussed the need for “seed capital to get an apartment, groceries, whatever,” and how funding to travel to locations and then get set up was rarely offered but was an essential prerequisite to being able to access urban job opportunities if that is what someone desired. They mentioned that the civil society organizations they knew of hadn’t yet found a way to solve this. For example, employment matchmaking services could tell someone, “I’ve got a job for you in Calgary. Here’s a great pay rate,” but getting to town and finding a place to stay is too big a barrier if people don’t have savings they can use, not to mention additional challenges such as culture shock.

In what follows, research participants articulated barriers preventing them from leaving an employer, occupation, or sector for something new. In addition, they and EDI experts articulated solutions that could help de-risk “innovative hazards” and allow for the switching of careers more fluidly, with less stress and personal expense.

Barriers and strategies related to career mobility are articulated from two different perspectives:

- 1 ▶ Inclusive Career Transitions: The Role of Employers
- 2 ▶ Inclusive Reskilling: The Role of Educational Institutions, Policymakers, and Civil Society

Inclusive Career Transitions: The Role of Employers

Employers have a lot to gain from the transferable skills of career transitioners. However, there are important challenges inherent in crafting hiring, onboarding, and retaining people who are switching roles mid-career. Furthermore, an inclusive approach to hiring career transitioners must consider ways to appropriately evaluate the international credentials of newcomers, reduce unconscious bias in the hiring process, and value lived experience.

97

Statistics Canada, “The Daily – Study: A 30-Year Look at the Work Histories of Canadian Workers,” December 9, 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/211209/dq211209e-eng.htm>



In what follows, participants articulated barriers to entering a new workplace or transitioning their careers. For managers and employers, strategies are related to supporting new entrants in their workplaces. These strategies contribute to retention and advancement from an employer's perspective while permitting career mobility and opportunity for an applicant.

Inequitable Access to Networks

Employers seeking to support career mobility for all applicants should first examine where their job opportunities are advertised and the resulting pool of applicants. ICTC's Employer Survey found that 62% of respondents agreed that a referral from a trusted source was important to the hiring process, suggesting that social networks are a key factor in finding work and getting hired. Insights from interviewees corroborated this finding and spoke of the prevalence of a "hidden job market" where "50% of jobs are not posted," noting that networking is a necessary skill for job seekers to find job opportunities not advertised on job boards.

However, an overreliance on network-based hiring introduces the risk of nepotism, where limited access to networks creates barriers for racialized, immigrant, and newcomer workers. Networking emerged as a crucial catalyst for career advancement during the Edmonton focus group session, particularly for newcomers seeking employment in Canada without established networks. Participants highlighted the significance of employment and settlement services, serving as entry points for newcomers to access the job market. If employers fail to engage with these resources, they miss out on crucial opportunities. A research contributor from a Black-led community-serving organization in BC commented that many employers don't form connections with racialized and newcomer communities before the recruitment phase, hindering their ability to foster meaningful relationships.

The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the necessity of networking for job seekers since the pandemic reduced the availability of networking opportunities due to cancelled in-person networking events. Interviewees noted that these events allowed job seekers to show their personalities and enabled employers to get to know them in person. It also allowed job seekers to explain aspects of their resume, such as the reason for a career gap (if they've had one). This reduction in networking opportunities for racialized and newcomer career transitioners has hindered their ability to change careers. Even for some racialized and newcomer job seekers who have worked to enter professional networks despite the pandemic, the outcomes may not always align with their expectations. An interviewee shared, "I've earned my master's degree, but I still feel excluded from networks."

LinkedIn has coined the term "network gap" to describe this deficiency in social capital for equity-deserving communities, emphasizing the ongoing challenges faced by individuals seeking to bridge these gaps.⁹⁸ For Black individuals aspiring to thrive as knowledge workers, a persistent "network gap" poses significant challenges. The limited representation of Black professionals in industries like technology results in a scarcity of sponsors, mentors, and peers willing to open doors to opportunities, exacerbating the existing barriers to career transition.

98

Meg Garlinghouse, "Closing the Network Gap," LinkedIn, September 26, 2019, <https://www.linkedin.com/blog/member/impact/closing-the-network-gap>



With fewer in-person networking opportunities during the pandemic, people created virtual networking platforms. An example is the Black Professionals in Tech Network's Obsidi, a multi-sided marketplace for Black professionals to network globally, learn, go to events, connect with executives from leading tech companies and access future job opportunities. Virtual networking events enable people to connect outside the restraints of physical proximity and can be leveraged to help racialized and newcomer workers build their professional networks.

Strategies: Bridging the Network Gap

To bridge the network gap for racialized, immigrant, and newcomer career transitioners, employers can implement several strategic initiatives. First and foremost, advertising job opportunities in diverse forums are essential to reaching a broader talent pool. Vancouver session research contributors suggested that collaborating with community-led recruitment organizations can prove highly effective in connecting with individuals from these communities; however, forming long-term relationships that aren't centred just on hiring is key to a sustainable inclusion strategy. Similarly, a Vancouver-based advocacy organization also recommended establishing partnerships with formal mentorship and sponsorship programs offered by organizations, such as settlement services, as a way to recruit diverse talent.

Developing effective and inclusive recruitment strategies to bridge the network gap for racialized and newcomer career transitioners requires authentic and intentional effort by employers to transcend token gestures. For the strategy to be successful, employers must make it a priority instead of a side-of-desk task.

Employers can foster inclusivity in their hiring practices by conducting interviews with diverse candidates, even if they don't meet every qualification outlined in the job description. This approach helps mitigate biases and opens the door for individuals who can bring unique perspectives and skills to the organization. Additionally, staying in touch with diverse candidates, even if they aren't an immediate fit for a specific role, demonstrates a commitment to building long-term relationships. By adopting these strategies, employers can help dismantle the network gap and foster a more equitable and inclusive environment for racialized and newcomer career transitioners.

Employer Biases and Discrimination: Impact on Career Transitioners

The fear of discrimination often hinders employees from bringing their cultures into the workplace and can be a significant job search barrier for racialized and newcomer career transitioners. This phenomenon was dubbed "covering" by sociologist Erving Goffman and legal scholar Kenji Yoshino. Covering describes the pressure to downplay certain aspects of someone's identity on a daily basis.⁹⁹ In 2019, a study conducted by Deloitte found that 67% of women of colour respondents reported covering in the workplace.¹⁰⁰

99 Olivia Suarez, "Are You 'Covering' at Work? You're Not Alone," accessed January 9, 2024, <https://business360.fortefoundation.org/are-you-covering-at-work-youre-not-alone/>

100 Ibid.



Examples of covering were also expressed by interviewees, describing their anxiety about potential discrimination based on physical appearance. An EDI specialist shared personal concerns about the impact of her hairstyle on perceptions of professionalism, citing worries about wearing twists or braids during interviews. This concern can extend to not wearing a hijab in job interviews due to anticipated judgments. These experiences shed light on the pervasive challenges and biases that racialized and newcomer job seekers face throughout the hiring process.

The existence of biases and discriminatory practices in the workplace exacerbates these challenges. Cultural representation was also raised throughout the interviews for this study. For example, some participants described a jarring lack of Indigenous cultural and linguistic representation in corporate culture. Several research participants felt unsafe bringing their cultures into the workplace. An absence of cultural inclusivity also influences career aspirations: for some contributors, the perceived lack of acknowledgement and integration of diverse cultures and identities contributed to a reluctance to try certain careers.

While both bias and discrimination must be confronted, it is crucial to distinguish between the two. Bias, in this context, can be understood as preconceived notions or prejudices that individuals may hold. On the other hand, discrimination, according to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, involves the intersection of specific grounds of discrimination, discriminatory actions, and resulting negative impacts on individuals.¹⁰¹ While legislation such as the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Employment Equity Act prohibit workplace discrimination, some of the research participants engaged in this study reported experiencing discrimination. Effectively addressing both bias and discrimination is paramount in fostering an inclusive work environment that not only allows employees to bring their cultures into the workplace but also facilitates equitable career transitions for racialized and newcomer workers.

Interviewees shared troubling instances where racialized and newcomer candidates, despite being exceptionally qualified for the roles, faced rejection in favour of less qualified applicants. A newcomer in Halifax recounted a personal experience of interviewing for an IT position only to be informed that the company opted for a candidate with more experience. To their surprise, the selected individual had a background in agricultural technology while they held a computer science degree. Additionally, participants in Edmonton expressed frustration as roles explicitly advertised for Indigenous people were still awarded to non-Indigenous applicants, adding to their discouragement in the job search.

These attitudes among employers have led some racialized and newcomer job seekers to hesitate in self-identifying. Self-identification can be perceived as a barrier for Indigenous people who don't want to be stigmatized. A First Nations focus group contributor in Edmonton commented, "Sometimes when I apply for programs, I go down the form, and then I see First Nations, Métis, Inuit, I wonder if I lie and don't say FNMI, will they let me in." This can be problematic for organizations that have affirmative action policies in place.

101

Canadian Human Rights Commission, "Discrimination: What can I do about it?" accessed January 8, 2024, https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/discrimination_2020_eng.pdf



Job Requirements that Perpetuate Inequity in Hiring Career Transitioners

Many research contributors reported experiencing job requirements that they felt were superfluous and expanded barriers to entry. In an Edmonton focus group, contributors reported being asked in interviews about language ability rather than skills, even when language proficiency was not a crucial requirement for the role. Meanwhile, job seekers in Halifax who were newcomers faced a unique challenge as employers were unwilling to call foreign references and wanted Canadian names instead. In an Indigenous focus group in Edmonton, participants pointed out the barriers associated with having a criminal record, emphasizing the need to provide individuals with second chances for meaningful employment. Additionally, as discussed in Part I, vaccination requirements posed a challenge in hiring, with some participants expressing distrust or lack of access to vaccines, underscoring the importance of understanding diverse circumstances and perspectives in the hiring process. These multifaceted barriers underscore the need for nuanced and inclusive approaches in supporting individuals throughout their career transitions.

Strategies: Mitigating Bias and Discrimination for Equity-Deserving Career Transitioners

Employers can implement intentional strategies to mitigate bias and discrimination for equity-deserving career transitioners by anticipating and addressing the apprehensions that individuals may feel during the hiring process. One practical approach involves partnering with community-serving organizations that use a support system where a staff member accompanies applicants to interviews, fostering a more comfortable environment. This not only alleviates the stress of judgment but also allows the accompanying person to highlight relevant experiences that candidates might not articulate themselves. Another important strategy is implementing diverse hiring panels: interviewers can also be trained to begin recognizing unconscious bias in the hiring process.¹⁰²

To reduce job and education requirements that continue to perpetuate discrimination and inequities and to foster a more inclusive talent sourcing and management process, employers can embrace flexibility and openness toward candidates with community experience in a specific field, even if they lack a designated degree. This approach acknowledges the value of practical, on-the-ground knowledge and skills gained through community engagement. Employers whose work does not require criminal record checks can assess if this requirement is necessary. These strategies collectively work toward creating a sourcing landscape that values diverse experiences and qualifications, fostering opportunities for individuals who may not fit conventional criteria but bring valuable skills and perspectives to the table.

Furthermore, on the retention front, acknowledging the challenges individuals face in bringing their cultural identities to the workplace is essential. Strategies for creating inclusive workplaces are discussed in greater detail in Part III of this paper.

102

Maryna Ivus and Maya Watson, "Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem: Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting Entry- and Mid-Level Talent," Ottawa, ON: Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), May 2022.



Lack of Representation in a New Organization or Field

A significant deterrent to individuals contemplating a career transition is the lack of diversity and representation within a field caused by discrimination in the workplace. This contributes to the network gap experienced by racialized and newcomer job seekers, as discussed earlier, but can also lead to concerns about tokenization. Several interviewees noted instances where they were the sole Black or Indigenous person in their organization, with one participant stating they explicitly “ask employers what their diversity ratio is in interviews because [they] have had jobs where [they are] the only Black person in the company.” Another interviewee highlighted the importance of scrutinizing the composition of leadership and boards, as there is a lack of diversity at senior levels—particularly if there is greater diversity in lower-level roles.¹⁰³

Improved Representation Signals an Inclusive Environment for Career Transitioners: Strategies

Inclusive organizations foster cultures that respect and incorporate the rich diversity of their workforce, ultimately encouraging career mobility and progression for all employees. To foster diversity and representation in the workplace, employers can adopt a multifaceted approach. Furthermore, employers can explicitly demonstrate their commitment to equity by including equity statements in job descriptions, signalling a dedication to creating a workplace that values diversity and provides equal opportunities for all. Job descriptions can also be edited to use inclusive language (e.g., avoiding gendered terminology), including only the skill requirements that will actually be used in a job or specifying that alternative education and skill backgrounds will be considered. Similarly, employers can include content that references valuing diversity of experience on an organization’s website and other public-facing materials.

An integral aspect of promoting diversity is the incorporation of respectful culture and language in the hiring process, creating an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere. Addressing the lack of knowledge about Indigenous Peoples and their diverse cultures is crucial. Employers should recognize that a pan-Indigenous approach falls short when creating a truly inclusive workplace for Indigenous Peoples and should instead take the time to learn about the specific cultures and customs of the Indigenous Peoples in their community. One interviewee highlighted the existence of training opportunities that enhance employers’ understanding of Indigenous Peoples and the available funding avenues for such programs. By implementing these strategies, employers can contribute to a more inclusive and diverse workplace that not only attracts diverse talent but also ensures the ongoing satisfaction and retention of individuals from various backgrounds, a subject discussed more fulsomely in Part III: Career Advancement.

103

Please see Section III for a fulsome discussion of the barriers to career advancement for Black, Indigenous, and racialized workers.



Equity Statements in Job Postings: How Common Are They?

ICTC conducted a keyword analysis of the 2M+ job postings gathered in this study to examine what types of equity statements were included in job descriptions. Approximately one-third of all postings, 667,230, contained a keyword like “diversity,” “equal opportunity,” “equity,” “inclusion,” or specifically named inclusive policies related to “gender identity,” “persons with disabilities,” “sexual orientation,” or “culturally diverse” employees. Many job descriptions also included an acknowledgement of traditional, Treaty, or unceded territory. In general, the presence of equity statements by sector matched the overall distribution of sectors in the job dataset. However, some variation by sector is visible, as illustrated in Figure 7.

PERCENTAGE OF JOB POSTINGS CONTAINING EQUITY-RELATED KEYWORD, BY EMPLOYER SECTOR

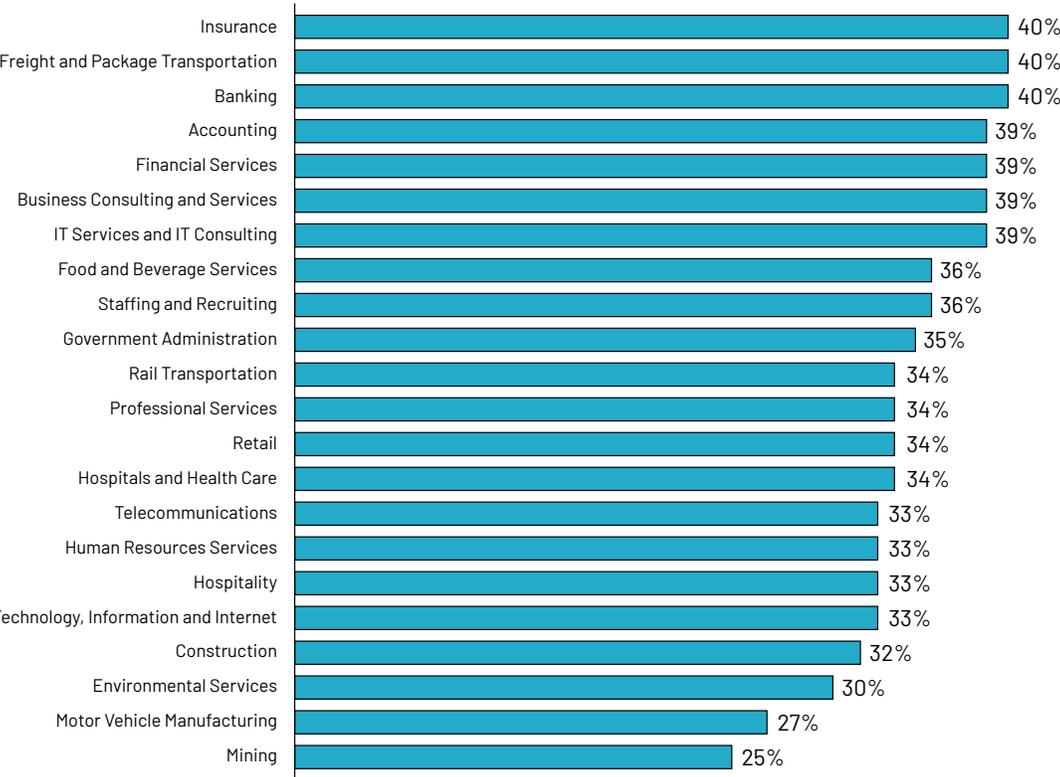


Figure 7: Percentage of job posts with equity-related keywords, ICTC dataset, Oct 2022-2023. Note: This chart reflects approximately half of the sectors for which ICTC has data: sectors with fewer than 1000 job posts containing equity-related keywords are excluded here.

However, while including an equity statement in job postings can signal an inclusive workplace, that does not mean this is representative of how inclusive the workplace environment is. Candidates who value diversity and inclusion research a prospective organization to see who is on the leadership team, the organization's social impact, and other material ways the employer is fostering diversity and inclusivity. Thus, for an equity statement to be effective, the employer must have a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion and should display their commitment visibly on their website and social media.

Recognizing Career Transitioners' Credentials and Experiences

International Credential Recognition and Canadian Experience

Canadian employers' perceptions of different kinds of credentials and experience, specifically the preference for Canadian experience and credentials, is a bias that continues to hinder racialized and newcomer job seekers' career transition. As part of the *Working for Workers Act 2021*, the Government of Ontario has introduced legislation that bans regulated professions from requiring Canadian work experience, recognizing it as an unfair and discriminatory requirement.¹⁰⁴ As discussed in Part I, it has long been established that skilled immigrants' employment experiences in Canada are often those of "deskilling" and "downward occupational mobility" and that these experiences intersect with racialization.¹⁰⁵ Employer openness to immigrant expertise has been identified as a key barrier perpetuating this issue.¹⁰⁶

In this study, research participants who had arrived in Canada in the past few years highlighted how foreign credential recognition presents significant obstacles to transitioning to the Canadian workforce. Lack of recognition for their credentials and experience from their home countries results in job seekers being compelled to accept entry-level or lower-level positions than they are qualified for. For instance, a contributor in Atlantic Canada with two decades of experience in business consulting aiding foreign companies in establishing branches in Shanghai found themselves unable to leverage that expertise in Canada and now works as an airport shuttle driver. This example also demonstrates how the lack of recognition leads to the underutilization of people's skills, eventually leading to a loss of human and intellectual capital. One study estimated that in 2006, the underutilization of immigrants' skills cost the Canadian economy about \$11.37 billion (in 2013 dollars).¹⁰⁷

The demand for Canadian credentials becomes a discouraging aspect for job seekers who have already invested years in education and hold high-level qualifications like master's or Ph.D. degrees. This requirement, as discussed in the Edmonton session, leads to frustration and demotivation, particularly when the requested exams or certifications do not align with the practical, on-the-job skills needed for their professions. Newcomers in this focus group expressed their disillusionment after discovering that their qualifications vetted during the immigration process may not seamlessly translate into Canadian job opportunities but instead require new training, exams, or certifications. A registered nurse from Nigeria exemplifies this challenge: they are overqualified for their current job and frustrated having to navigate the conversion of their schooling for Canadian licensure, including unexpected English competency exams that took a year to complete (despite English being Nigeria's official language). The time, money, and effort required for recredentialing act as a significant barrier for career transitioners.

104 Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, "Ontario Removing Unfair Work Barriers for Skilled Newcomers," Ontario.ca, May 23, 2023, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1003079/ontario-removing-unfair-work-barriers-for-skilled-newcomers>

105 Luciana Nardon et al., "Skilled immigrant women's career trajectories during the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal," *Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion*, June 2021, Vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 112-128.; Gillian Creese and Brandy Wiebe, "Survival Employment": Gender and Deskilling among African Immigrants in Canada," *International Migration*, Vol. 50, no. 5, 2012, pp. 56-76.

106 Brahim Boudarbat and Gilles Grenier, "Immigration in Quebec: Labor Market Integration and Contribution to Economic Growth," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 49, no. 2, 2017, pp. 13-32.; Rupa Banerjee et al., "Evaluating Foreign Skills," *Canadian Public Policy*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2021, pp. 358-372

107 Jeffrey G. Reitz, Josh Curtis, and Jennifer Elrick, "Immigrant Skill Utilization: Trends and Policy Issues," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 15, no. 1, February 1, 2014: pp. 1-26, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-012-0265-1>



Recognizing Qualification from Prior Careers and Lived Experience

Credential recognition was also salient for Indigenous employees. An EDI specialist raised the point that North American employers had high expectations around credentials but that many Indigenous education systems are less recognized. “They are qualified, but they may not be qualified in the way that the Western standard typically sees.” Furthermore, as discussed in Part I, Indigenous communities in Canada face systematic barriers to accessing secondary and post-secondary education stemming from the effects of colonization and the residential school system. Placing excessive emphasis on formal education may lead to overlooking candidates who have gained expertise through community learning rather than traditional educational channels.

An Indigenous workforce development consultant interviewed for this study suggested that overlooking Indigenous qualifications in the job market creates a troubling cycle where Indigenous individuals, feeling undervalued, may downplay or discredit their qualifications and expertise. Participants from the Edmonton session for Indigenous Peoples shared that “people are intimidated by jobs in the big cities, even when they have the skills... People don’t think their experience is relevant even when it is, so they leave it out of resumes or don’t bring it up in job interviews... People have held great positions on reserve but don’t have experience in those positions off reserve and think that means they’re not qualified for the job.” This phenomenon not only perpetuates a lack of representation but also hinders the career transition of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized individuals who possess valuable skills and experiences, which contributes to the broader issue of overly prescriptive job requirements preventing meaningful professional transitions. In ICTC’s Employer Survey, 92% of respondents agreed that a candidate’s confidence in their skills was somewhat or very important. Unfortunately, assessments of “soft skills,” including the subjective evaluation of confidence, can be influenced by inherent biases and skewed by variables such as accent and gender. This creates an environment where racialized and newcomer career transitioners continue to face additional hurdles based on expectations around behavioural norms that may not align with their cultural communication styles.

Recognizing Career Transitioners’ Credentials & Experiences: Strategies

Particularly for professions without strict regulations (e.g., engineering), employers have significant power to adopt strategic measures to enhance credential and experience recognition for racialized and newcomer career transitioners. Insights from the Vancouver session emphasize that smaller tech companies, where hiring decisions are made by tech staff, offer a more accessible pathway for candidates without official degrees. In these environments, a portfolio or demonstration of skills becomes a crucial evaluation criterion, sidestepping the overreliance on traditional signals like degrees or certifications seen in larger organizations where HR often lacks the technical expertise to assess candidates directly. Employers can leverage this approach to create more inclusive talent-sourcing processes, focusing on the practical demonstration of skills, working experience and lived experience rather than formal qualifications.



Additionally, implementing tools such as entry-level experience opportunities, targeted further training and leadership development, career matchmaking services, and bridging programs can play a pivotal role in recognizing and valuing the diverse experiences and qualifications of racialized and newcomer job seekers. These tools can facilitate a smoother transition by providing tailored support, addressing skill gaps, and promoting a more equitable evaluation of candidates.

Summary of Strategies: Inclusive Career Transitions: The Role of Employers

CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Bridging The Network Gap	Advertise job opportunities broadly outside of LinkedIn and other traditional programs that don't necessarily attract diverse candidates.	Educational Institutions Private Sector Public Sector	Read Meg Garlinghouse's article on "Closing the Network Gap," LinkedIn, September 26, 2019; https://www.linkedin.com/blog/member/impact/closing-the-network-gap
	Partner with community-led recruitment organizations, employment and settlement services, sponsorship/mentorship programs, or other groups that have connections to the community.		Consult or leverage resources from community-serving organizations, including: Npower Canada; https://npowercanada.ca/ Indigenous Works; Indigenous Careers - Canada's National Indigenous Online Job Site; https://employers.indigenouscareers.org/ Abilities to Work; https://www.abilitiestowork.ca/ Ase Community Foundation for Black Canadians with Disabilities; https://asecommunityfoundation.com/ Mentoring Canada, "the Knowledge Hub," https://mentoringcanada.ca/en/knowledge-hub
	Build long-term, sustainable relationships with community-serving organizations. Interview widely, including participants with lived or professional experience and potential to develop into the role.		
Lack of Representation as a Barrier to Career Transitions	Build a workplace that allows people to bring their culture to work; this may include cultural awareness training.	Private Sector Public Sector	Complete DeEtta Jones and Associates "Inclusive Onboarding Checklist" to strengthen inclusive onboarding processes and contribute to a more inclusive workplace: https://facultyresources.fas.harvard.edu/files/facultyresources/files/4.2_inclusive_onboarding_checklist.pdf?m=1609876131
	Signal inclusive workplaces via equity statements in job descriptions.		
	Strengthen onboarding of racialized and newcomer employees by implementing first-day job shadowing and surveying new employees during and after their onboarding process.		Learn how to draft an EDI statement using the University of Texas at Austin Center for Teaching & Learning's "Drafting a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Statement": https://ctl.utexas.edu/drafting-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dei-statement



Strengthen retention of racialized and newcomer employees by conducting regular check-ins with employees to keep track of their stress levels and possible accommodations they may need and be open to feedback that creates space for all cultures, identities and genders.

Include community, accessibility groups and knowledge keepers (i.e., Indigenous and Black community leaders) in sourcing and hiring processes.

Ensure that leaders and hiring managers are provided with Inclusive Leadership training for Recruiting and Allyship in Action.

CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Mitigating Bias and Discrimination for Equity-Deserving Career Transitioners	Anticipate and address worries about bias in hiring: for example, by pairing with a community-serving organization.	Educational Institutions	<p>Visit Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society's website to learn about or get involved with employment and skill development programs for Indigenous communities in Alberta, such as Journey to Success (a 6-week pre-employment program): https://bentarrow.ca/programs-and-services/journey-to-success/</p> <p>Read ICTC's report, "Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem: Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting Entry- and Mid-Level Talent," https://www.digitalthinktankictc.com/reports/gender-equity-in-canadas-tech-ecosystem</p> <p>Download, read, and make inclusive language guides available to employees, such as:</p> <p>Regional Municipality of York's "Inclusive Language Guide," March 2022: https://www.wpboard.ca/hypfiles/uploads/2023/06/York-Region-Inclusive-Language-Guide_2.pdf</p> <p>BC Public Service Agency's "Words Matter: Guidelines on Using Inclusive Language in the Workplace," May 2018: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/careers/all-employees/working-with-others/words-matter.pdf</p>
	Implement a support system so that new employees have access to someone who can explain the basics of the job expectations and the organization.	Private Sector	
	Adopt diverse hiring panels and offer interviewers training in unconscious bias recognition.	Public Sector	
	Use inclusive language in the job description and avoid using overcomplicated language such as local colloquialisms, slang terms, acronyms, or industry jargon.		



CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Recognizing Career Transitioners' Qualifications and Experiences	<p>Determine specific technical skills that are necessary for the role (vs. "nice to haves"), the level of skill required, and how these skills will be assessed, such as portfolios.</p> <p>Determine the core outputs and/or outcomes that the role is responsible for</p> <p>Offer entry-level experience opportunities, targeted further training, career matchmaking services, and bridging programs.</p>	<p>Educational Institutions</p> <p>Private Sector</p> <p>Public Sector</p> <p>Civil Society</p>	<p>Find tools for skill assessment or upgrading through Employment and Social Development Canada, "Skills for Success - Assessment and Training Tools": https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success/tools.html</p> <p>Visit the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials to learn more about career mobility and credential recognition: https://www.cicic.ca/</p> <p>To help build welcoming and equitable workplaces and communities, Skills for Change offers a variety of employment, language training, mentorship, and other programs. Visit their website to see how to get involved or enroll in a program: https://skillsforchange.org/</p> <p>Enroll in training from or engage with a settlement and employment services organization, such as: MOSAIC (Greater Vancouver and British Columbia): https://mosaicbc.org/</p> <p>Immigrants Working Centre Hamilton: https://iwchamilton.ca/</p> <p>Newcomer Employment Hub of Winnipeg: https://winnipeg-chamber.com/neh/</p> <p>S.U.C.C.E.S.S. BC Employment Services: https://successbc.ca/service-categories/employment/</p> <p>Ottawa World Skills: https://ottawa-worldskills.org/</p> <p>Apply for a wage subsidy program, such as WorkBC: https://www.workbc.ca/discover-employment-services/wage-subsidy-program</p> <p>Learn more about wage subsidy programs through the Government of Canada: https://www.canada.ca/en/services/business/hire/wagesubsidiesotherassistanceprograms.html</p>



Inclusive Reskilling: The Role of Educational Institutions, Civil Society, and Government

Changing careers, or even roles within the same career, forces an accounting of transferable skills—skills that we can carry with us to our new occupation—and competencies that we will need to acquire for the first time. “Reskilling” is shorthand for acquiring the essential competencies that will allow us to take on a new role, and reskilling can be more or less onerous depending on existing transferable skills (for example, some jobs have greater or lesser skills overlap). Furthermore, many occupations rely on standardized credentials as a prerequisite to entry: for these, individuals may need to retake substantive education even if they have some of the requisite skills already.

Access to **inclusive reskilling** is an important component of easing the disproportionate effect of labour market segmentation. Programming designed to support career mobility can be more or less inclusive and more or less effective, depending on its goals and approaches. For example, one study of young adults from racialized communities in Toronto (29 of 36 identifying as Black) outlined the danger of aiming too low with ongoing education. The authors found that participants identified personal behaviours and individual “inadequacies” as contributing to their lack of success in the labour market. The authors suggested that “the internalization of individual inadequacies is only enhanced by labour market policy strategies that seek primarily to aid in the development of basic skills (such as computer use and literacy), when, due to labour market shifts, government programs and policies should be focusing instead on the development of professional and technical-level skills (such as field-specific knowledge and abilities to carry out a particular employment role).”¹⁰⁸ In short, the paper found that overly modest goals for training, “only supporting attachment to the lower skill/lower pay employment sector,”¹⁰⁹ could perpetuate job seekers’ harsh self-analysis. The authors argue that “young adults’ psychosocial frameworks around successful labour market attachment have become aligned to the demands of the contemporary labour market (which asks for higher education, greater prevalence of specialized skills, and perseverance in a highly competitive labour market).”¹¹⁰

Similarly, analysts of Indigenous economic inclusion have argued that “short-term, remedial skills training” approaches “aimed at quickly moving individuals into employment run counter to the often complex needs of those individuals who are most vulnerable to social and economic exclusion.”¹¹¹ They argue that other wraparound supports, including childcare, financial support, and demand-side measures like employer inclusivity training, are essential to supporting Indigenous economic inclusion and emphasize the importance of Indigenous-led long-term training opportunities.¹¹²

108 Michael Shier, John Graham, and Marilyn Eisenstat, “Psychosocial Characteristics and Successful Labour Market Attachment Among Young Adults: The Internalization of Individual Inadequacy as Explanations for Failures within the Labour Market,” *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth*, Vol. 7, no. 1, 2015, pp. 27-54, <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index/php/cjfy>

109 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

110 *Ibid.*

111 Shauna MacKinnon, *Decolonizing Employment: Aboriginal Inclusion in Canada's Labour Market*, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015.

112 *Ibid.*



An Indigenous participant in Regina commented similarly, “I don’t even really like the word program because it seems like, as an Indigenous person, all we’ve ever been doing is programs. We’re programmed to death. It’s mainly non-Indigenous, mainly about money... People are writing for money to run your program, and sometimes the outcomes don’t really work.” Describing an Indigenous-led cultural program at their university, they said, “I like using the word support [instead] because we do rely on each other a lot.”

A range of inclusive and supportive reskilling opportunities, directed at roles of all kinds and attached to transparent labour market information, allows job seekers to exercise greater agency in directing their careers. Furthermore, as discussed in Part I, inclusive reskilling ideally offers some insurance against the risk of displacement, which is particularly important when workers from racialized communities continue to be overrepresented in sectors at risk of automation. While secondary and post-secondary institutions are built around supporting the education of students early in their lives and careers, they also have dedicated adult and ongoing education programs and opportunities to recredential, respecting the needs of students who may have full-time work and financial and family commitments. Furthermore, many micro-credential programs—short-term, competency-focused courses—are built with career transitioners in mind. Despite the existence of educational programs for adult learning, many career transitioners still face barriers related to reskilling. The next section articulates barriers to reskilling that research participants have faced, followed by potential strategies to ameliorate these challenges on the part of educational institutions, civil society, and government.



Education Supporting Upskilling: Micro-Credentials

In recent years, Canadian universities and colleges are developing micro-credential programs in significant numbers. While there is no standard definition of micro-credentials, they can be characterized as flexible, short-term, skills-based learning opportunities. Ideally, these programs are developed in partnership with local industry and tailored to meet industry-specific workforce needs.

Micro-credentials are often offered online and may be particularly advantageous for newcomers to Canada and busy adult learners who want to upgrade their skills in pursuit of new or better job opportunities. With a cost-effective, targeted, and flexible pathway for skill enhancement, micro-credentials provide a useful model for reskilling and upskilling workers in the pursuit of career goals and advancement.



The Financial Burden of Reskilling

A Vancouver interviewee identifying as a Person of colour was interested in getting into UX/UI design. They described looking for funding to pursue a recredentialing program in AR/VR development, either through the University of British Columbia or the boot camp Lighthouse Labs but found that all the scholarships were either for people under 30 or for recent newcomers, so they “fell through the cracks” of available subsidies despite having been displaced by the pandemic. A First Nations educator in Edmonton, similarly, had looked for a variety of programs that would help with funding to retrain but found many that would have required them to be on social assistance to qualify. Overall, many participants were able to support themselves but were interested in pursuing further education to change careers; however, securing a window in life and adequate funding to take time away from a job was not easy.

In this study, many participants described reskilling—or recredentialing, for newcomers taking a similar program for a second time—as a significant financial risk: a Black research contributor in Regina joked, “I just have to make enough money to pay off the loans that I’ve got. And then I can get more loans to pay off to go back to school.” This challenge is widespread and not limited to career transitioners from racialized communities, nor limited to Canada. However, the OECD recently demonstrated that Canada’s share of workers who did not participate in training because it was too expensive was slightly above the OECD average in 2018 (18.8% vs. 15.4%; see Figure 8).¹¹³ Within Canada, and more recently, a survey of 1,500 recipients of an income replacement program during COVID found that financial challenges were a barrier for 61% of respondents who were thinking of pursuing career-related education or training and more so for racialized respondents (75%).¹¹⁴

PERCENTAGE WHO DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN TRAINING BECAUSE IT WAS TOO EXPENSIVE

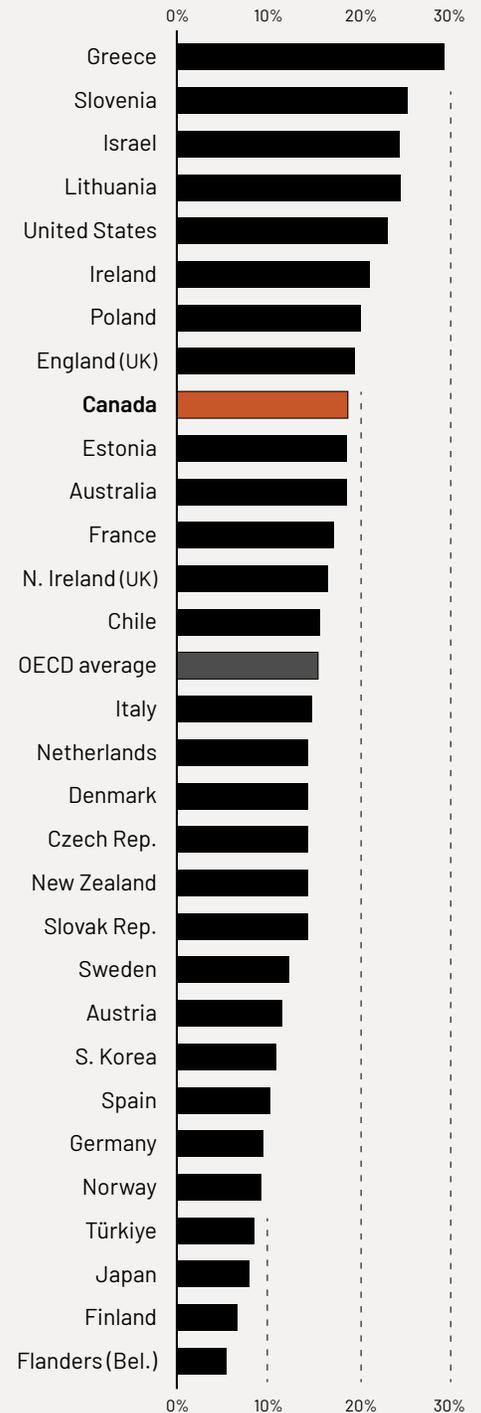


Figure 8: Share of workers aged 25–64 years in each country who did not participate in training because it was too expensive. Source: OECD Skills Strategy Flanders, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1787/888933892003>

113
114

“OECD Skills Strategy Flanders,” *OECD*, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1787/888933892003>.
Katherine Scott and Trish Hennessy, “Canada Emergency Response Benefit: More than Just an Income Program,” *Future Skills Centre & Centre for Policy Alternatives*, June 2023, p. 19.



The financial burden of reskilling is exacerbated further if someone has to qualify for new training through high school upgrading. This challenge is quite salient for many Indigenous communities, many of which may lack access to schools that offer Grade 12 in their locations. In response to The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls related to education equity, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) report investing more in on-reserve schools supporting post-secondary education through community-led scholarship funding.¹¹⁵ In the project “Beyond 94,” a CBC-created tool that tracks progress toward CTAs in Canada, the Parliamentary Budget Officer reported an educational funding gap between on-reserve (federally funded) schools and provincial publicly run schools of \$665 million in 2016.¹¹⁶ ISC has since announced new funding (April 2019) so that “students in First Nations K to 12 schools are supported by funding that is comparable to funding in provincial education systems.”¹¹⁷ Census 2021 data (which does not include a complete Census of Indigenous Peoples in Canada)¹¹⁸ suggests that approximately 74% of Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) aged 25–64 have a high school diploma or equivalency certificate, whereas nearly 90% of non-Indigenous Peoples completed secondary education—nearly a 15% difference.¹¹⁹ More granularly, nearly 70% of First Nations peoples, 82% of Métis people, and a little more than 50% of Inuit peoples aged 25–64 have completed high school.¹²⁰ In short, significant structural adjustments are still required to guarantee equity in secondary education. In Iqaluit, one participant said, “Our school system is a couple years behind. It’s common that people move south to get their full high school education.” For career transitioners, this means that there is often one additional but hefty step on the journey to acquiring a new credential for a new career, which comes with costs in terms of money and time.

This challenge is also present for newcomers. An internationally educated professional who had recently moved to Canada described the challenge of being asked to do Canadian high school coursework to qualify for additional training despite already having a post-graduate degree. At the same time, they were juggling paying bills as well as sending money back home to their parents and others relying on them. Even when credentials are offered for a low or no cost, family commitments and the need for housing stability make it very challenging for many adults to go back to school. Research contributors voiced having to balance family commitments, work, and school while retraining. For example, a First Nations lifelong learner in Regina described the following scenario when asked whether COVID-19 had impacted her reskilling and career goals:

“It impacted it quite a bit, actually. Because when I went to school it was all online. So, it wasn’t really in the class setting. It was hard, but I made it through. I was still working in the evenings. I had my daughter; I took her to school when I needed to. We only had one vehicle, so I was driving my mom to work and my brother and sisters to school, too.”

115 “Education,” Government of Canada, June 2023, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524495412051/1557511602225>

116 “Beyond94: Truth and Reconciliation in Canada,” CBC News, June 22, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/beyond-94/publish-annual-reports-on-education-funding-and-educational-and-income-attainments>

117 “Education,” Government of Canada, June 2023, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524495412051/1557511602225>

118 “Incompletely enumerated reserves and settlements,” Statistics Canada, August 12, 2022, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/iers-repd-eng.cfm>

119 “Table 98-10-0422-01 High school completion by Indigenous identity and labour force status: Canada, provinces and territories, census divisions and census subdivisions with a population 5,000 or more [Data table],” Statistics Canada, October 4, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl/en/cv.action?pid=9810042201>

120 *ibid.*



Meanwhile, a newcomer in Halifax was working as a cashier at Loblaws and commented,

“ They would give me a scholarship if I wanted to study again. I have two Masters’ already, and I left my PhD because my daughter was born. So when I saw that they could give me an opportunity to study, I could not pursue it because of the problem of rent. I have to have full-time work. ”

Strategies for Addressing the Financial Burden of Reskilling

Apply prior learning assessments that consider lived experience and informal education to lessen the burden of adult education. Canadian educational institutions (including certificate programs, colleges, institutes, and universities) often offer a Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR) process. While the structure and types of pathways offered through PLAR vary from institution to institution, they offer ways for students to apply lived experience or previous professional experience to program entry and requirements.¹²¹ Research into the impact of PLAR has found correlations between receiving PLAR and succeeding in university (including measures such as enrolment and completion).¹²² A national survey of over 9,000 respondents in Canada in 2004 “found that more than two-thirds of people of colour, new Canadians, and young people with incomplete high school express a high interest in enrolment in adult education and training if their prior informal learning were to be recognized.”¹²³

Similarly, for some internationally educated professionals, bearing the cost of reskilling might not be strictly necessary if they can find an employer who does not require Canadian experience. As discussed in the previous section on employers’ roles in inclusive career transitions, many employers, training programs, and regulated professions have an opportunity to evaluate whether particular Canadian credentials are strictly necessary if they do, in fact, want internationally educated professionals to fill workforce demand.

Partner recredentialing with holistic supports, subsidies, and scholarships. Free high school upgrading is offered in many Canadian provinces, an important step toward assisting people’s ability to recredential and pivot. Some programs increase upgrading availability by offering childcare, transportation or housing support, and/or connections to a college campus where students can build familiarity and transition into a certificate, diploma, or degree program after pursuing college courses. For example, some Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET)-holding organizations provide support for childcare, transportation, and supplies.¹²⁴ Furthermore, a study by the Childcare Research and Resource Unit commented that university childcare received high support in terms of low- and no-rent and non-profit arrangements with their host institutions, often offering uniquely affordable childcare for student parents.¹²⁵

121 BC Prior Learning Action Network, “The PLAR Basics,” accessed Nov 20, 2023, <https://bcplan.ca/The-PLAR-Basics>

122 Geoff Peruniak and Rick Powell, “Back Eddies of Learning In the Recognition of Prior Learning: A Case Study,” *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education* vol. 33, no. 1, 2007: <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/cjuce-rcepu/index.php/cjuce-rcepu/article/view/18946/15463>

123 D.W. Livingstone, M. Raykov, and C. Turner, “Canadian Adults’ Interest in Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR): A 2004 National Survey,” *Centre for the Study of Education and Work*, Toronto, 2005, <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=281980faf6f5a484f848265957e97951fa670de6>, p. 1.

124 “Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Funding,” WorkBC, accessed December 21, 2023, <https://www.workbc.ca/find-loans-and-grants/students-and-adult-learners/indigenous-skills-and-employment-training-funding>

125 Friendly Martha and MacDonald Lyndsay, “Child Care in Canadian Universities,” University of Manitoba, September 1, 2014, <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/15/03/child-care-canadian-universities>



These same supports can contribute to success for anyone returning from a gap in education: A student at a First Nations-run post-secondary institution described a program specifically for “business students coming back from a year or more of leave.” They took about two years of maternity leave before deciding to return and appreciated the program “bringing me back to university life.” Having a daycare on their campus also greatly contributed to their ability to come back to school, as did having a First Nations employment centre on campus.

Support civil society and community-led organizations that curate and disseminate information about affordable programs, scholarships, and other supports. Importantly, all of these strategies also depend on awareness and ensuring that the right participants know about each policy and program. Throughout the study, several contributors commented that they simply couldn’t find the help they were looking for. Accordingly, organizations that collect information about relevant supports in a central location and can communicate eligibility criteria are crucial. For example, one newcomer focus group contributor who was asked what programs or supports would be helpful described wanting an “information platform to log in to, provide instructions to immigrants, learn what to do, what steps to take so that when people come here, they could make better decisions” about recertification options and timelines. Research participants described forming their own newcomer-led civil society groups to help support future immigrants with certification processes. In addition, many settlement service agencies help bridge language and credential gaps for newcomers who require English or French skills training.

Lack of Representation, Mentorship, and/or Culturally Relevant Training in a New Field

In the community engagement session in Iqaluit, participants commented that reskilling and upskilling programs based on Inuit cultures and languages were few and far between. “Inuit need to be fully bilingual for work,” one participant explained, “but we aren’t supported in learning our language. Inuktitut is not taught in schools.” Other Indigenous participants in this study also reported facing challenges with reskilling because they felt that educational institutions didn’t exist that reflected their languages, cultures, or values. An interviewee working in EDI, meanwhile, connected cultural relevance to mentorship, noting that if a student didn’t know anyone like them in their program, they were less likely to have guidance getting financial aid, navigating scholarship applications, or simply to be able to “see themselves doing it” and persevering.

Strategies for Supporting Mentorship and Culturally Relevant Reskilling

Support community-led training organizations. Many community-led training organizations exist, and research contributors named several that had helped them feel comfortable going back to school. Interviewees at the First Nations University of Regina described pursuing education there because they were attracted to its cultural relevance and competence. One student there said, “I think it’ll help me get closer to my Indigenous roots, I guess. I feel like I have lost my culture. I want to get into dancing with my daughter. I want to get back into beading, that kind of thing.”



Others described how reassuring it was to have family and friends, as well as other Indigenous professors, in the program and, during interviews, waving over at the daycare where several of their children were playing that day. A student at a First Nations-led educational institution noted, “I am comfortable here. There are some classes I will be taking at the [non-Indigenous institution], and there, I have felt out of place. I think in the past, there were a few First Nations people taking the same classes, but it just felt like a different setting... It was a lot harder for me to reach out to my instructor.”

A newcomer to Canada described relying on African-led community services in Regina because they had forums on Signal, Whatsapp, and Telegram where they could disseminate information about support services and jobs to the right message groups. They said, “I got support from the Nigerian community, a specialized group that is close to home for me, that supported me in getting a job. Network and support systems helped me land it.” In short, organizations led by community members are likely to be aware of what types of interventions are needed and helpful.

Incorporate community-led resource centres and mentorship opportunities in large institutions.

An Indigenous educator in BC mentioned that Indigenous resource centres at universities and colleges provided essential support for students and worked hard to be approachable, “like a home away from home. That’s a huge thing for someone who is leaving their community for the first time.” Similarly, an Indigenous economic development professional commented that having mentorship and a friendly face dedicated to helping people navigate education significantly influenced people’s access to reskilling.

Uncertainty About Employability After Program

While some research participants took classes purely out of interest, like theatre improv or visual art, many research contributors hoped that their reskilling would lead to employment. Not everyone found a job that aligned with the course they had taken. A newcomer in Ontario took a data analysis course in the US in 2021 but couldn’t find any jobs in Canada, acknowledging that course. In a community engagement session in Halifax in 2022 for racialized participants and newcomers, participants said they felt like university systems lack connections to businesses and that students themselves were pressured to make these connections, which could be tricky for newcomers.

Strategies for Improving Employability After Reskilling

Create more work-integrated learning programs for career transitioners. Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a form of experience-based education that, according to CEWIL Canada, “formally integrates a student’s academic studies with quality experiences within a workplace or practice setting.”¹²⁶ High-quality WIL addresses the goals of employers, students, and educational institutions and includes “(1) meaningful experience in a workplace setting; (2) curricular integration of workplace learning and academic learning; (3) student outcomes that lead to employability; and (4) reflection”¹²⁷ That is, there’s a difference between a student job and a WIL position: WIL is work that emphasizes both learning and integration within a student’s academic program.

126 “What is Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)?” Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning [CEWIL] Canada, n.d., accessed January 8, 2024, <https://cewilcanada.ca/CEWIL/CEWIL/About-Us/Work-Integrated-Learning.aspx>

127 Norah McRae, Judene Pretti, and Dana Church, “Work-Integrated Learning Quality Framework, AAA,” 2018, p. 6, https://www.cewilcanada.ca/common/Uploaded%20files/Public%20Resources/Resource%20Hub/wil_quality_framework_-_aaa_-_for_posting.pdf



CEWIL Canada recognizes nine distinct types of WIL—including, for example, trainee-nurse practicums, apprenticeships, internships, and course-based service learning. WIL is an effective tool for building adaptability, self-efficacy, and offering exposure to a new career; however, many older students and workers might have a hard time accessing WIL opportunities. A newcomer to Halifax described looking for internships, saying, “People don’t seem to want to invest in hiring older people, even though I have a lot of experience... As an example, typically, someone who is going for an internship is 20 years old. I’m 55 years old. I mean, I don’t write my age when I apply for internships, but they can see when I passed my PhD; this is a simple calculation.”

Support existing WIL-style programs for adult learners. Bridging programs close the gap between education and work experience. If designed for newcomers, bridging programs might take a short recredentialing experience and include a practicum with Canadian employment so that newcomers can use it as “Canadian experience” on a resume. Many ISETs also create a direct connection between employer demand and the training they deliver to clients. Research contributors described the impact of such programs:

“An Indigenous workforce development professional described a program to support adult career transitions where they first offered coursework, then made a partnership with an employer for a four-week unpaid work experience. “If I did have a student who had extensive experience in, let’s say, construction, and they wanted to go into becoming a cook or an assistant cook, we’d give them the training and the tickets they need.” Then, at the end of the program, they offer “four weeks [of] free on-the-job training... We will ask the employer to have them on the job and train them to see if they are able to take on the position. ”

“A First Nations research contributor in Saskatchewan described going into an electrician program with the help of an independent living centre. They self-described as having a disability and found the support of their living centre indispensable in creating a five-year plan. While they would have to pay for their courses and housing through a kitchen job, they appreciated the infrastructure helping them find appropriate credentials and an apprenticeship, which would eventually allow them to write a journeyman’s test work more independently. The independent living centre also supported them by helping with gear, like steel-toed boots for particular jobs, and securing certificates for roles in kitchen and automotive work. “They tell you about the school programs, the GEDs, all that stuff... I do pretty well with them. That is why I am confident with this career change. They offer a lot of support. ”

“A research contributor in Ottawa identifying as a person of colour, when asked about what types of programs or supports had been most helpful to their ability to develop essential skills, described appreciation for their co-op: “If I hadn’t done that co-op, even though the intention wasn’t for me to open the kitchen, I never would have thought of cooking as a career. I would have stuck to nursing or being a teacher or something. It really opened up the door, like, cooking is an option. It’s a career, and it’s something that you can love. So maybe co-ops where you can get a taste of the career, that would be great. ”



Improve the accessibility and usefulness of labour market information. Labour market information (LMI) is information about what types of jobs and skills are most in demand, where, and what kind of salary, trajectory, or security different occupations have in different industries. LMI might also include what training is required for a particular role and how to access pathways into that role. Finally, LMI might offer insight into transferable skills that career transitioners already possess that would help them toward a new profession.

For example, Figure 9 illustrates the most common human, transferable, or “soft” skills shared between two unlikely types of job descriptions: Mechanics and Operations Managers. Generated from the dataset of 2M+ job posts across Canada over the last five years, this type of analysis has the potential to illustrate to job seekers how much their existing training and experience have in common with new roles. Furthermore, even roles like these have “hard” competencies and certificates in common, such as knowledge of safety standards, a driver’s licence, knowledge of preventive maintenance, and knowledge of supply chains.

SOFT SKILLS: OPERATIONS MANAGER AND MECHANIC JOB DESCRIPTIONS

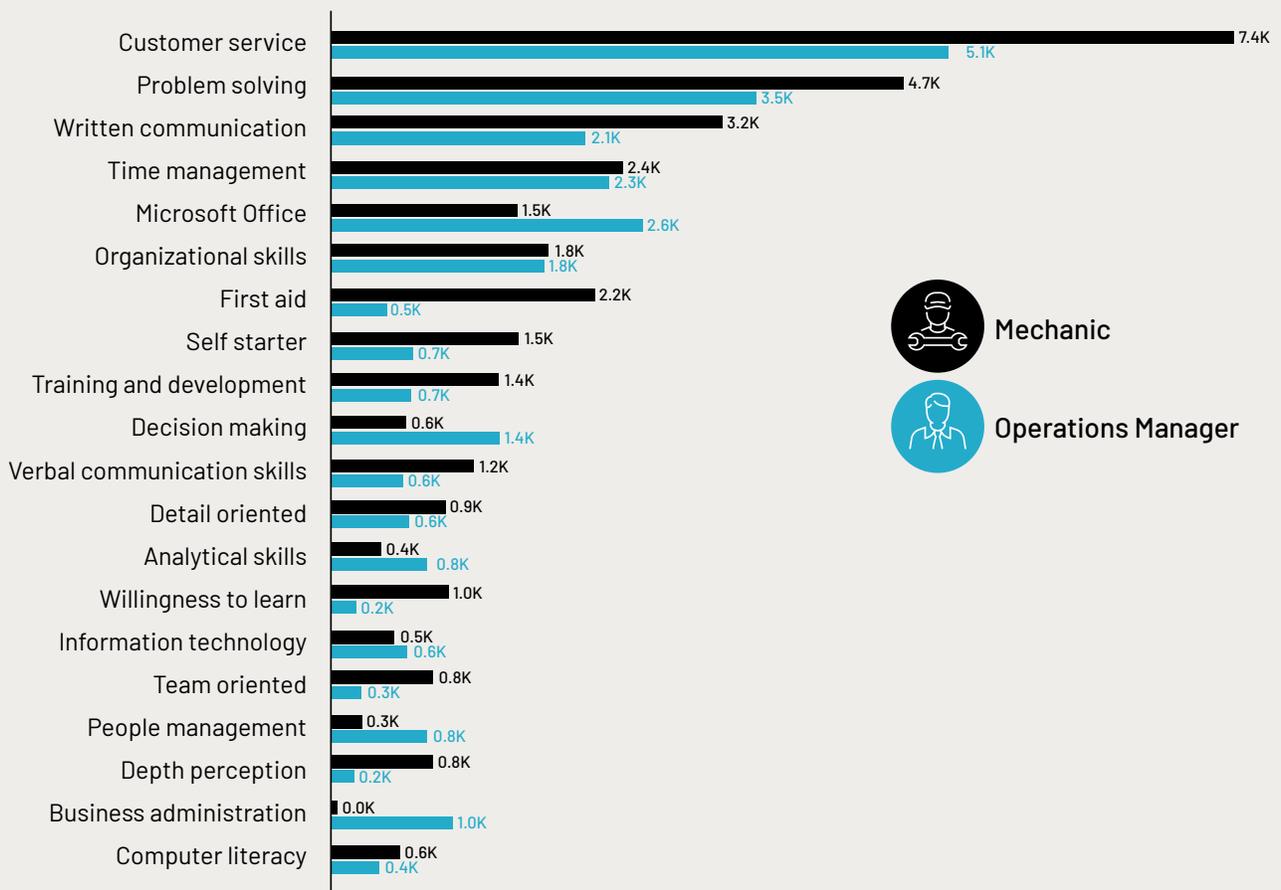


Figure 9: Common soft skills by unique count, operations manager and mechanic job descriptions, ICTC job dataset (see Appendix for methodology details).



LMI can be crucial for newcomers to orient themselves in a new job market. Research contributors in Alberta who were newcomers shared various challenges that eroded their confidence in applying for Canadian jobs. Firstly, the unfamiliarity with certain job titles created a perception that they might not be suitable for a position, even if they possessed the requisite skills. Secondly, disparities in application norms, such as the expectation for a one-page CV, proved to be unsettling. A participant emphasized the need for assistance in navigating these challenges, highlighting the significant differences in job titles between their home country and Canada. The participant expressed difficulty in understanding the true nature of jobs based solely on their titles and suggested that programs focused on Canadian business practices could offer valuable insights and support. This underscores the importance of providing resources and information to newcomers to enhance their understanding of the Canadian job market and alleviate uncertainty with unfamiliar job titles and application norms.

The following stories reflect some of the ways research contributors accessed or distributed LMI:

“A newcomer to Calgary commented that “some of my friends that came to Canada, they have transitioned into tech roles from data analysis and other courses. I checked it out because of that. I joined some Slack groups to get a feel for the areas I could get into. But the thing that discouraged me was the layoffs in January—the big headlines.”

“A founder of a Black-led employment services organization commented, “One of the things I always heard was, oh, we post jobs, but we don't have any Black applicants. Nobody comes to apply. And I thought, well, there's lots of Black people that need jobs, so maybe you have to do more work... When you go to the website, you'll see I created a job board. Now, employers can pay \$199 to post their job on the job board, but more Black candidates will have eyes on it. The idea is if you can post your job to a variety of places, rather than just sitting back and waiting and posting it, you know, just on LinkedIn, then it gets to wider networks.”

“An Indigenous inclusion consultant commented, “Employers need to use the communication networks that Indigenous people use. There again, this goes back to dedicating resources to this. This First Nation, for example, has a weekly newsletter. The jobs that are being advertised say what's going on in the community. Who's doing what? Where?”

Research contributors accessed LMI through informal and personal networks, civil society organizations, job fairs, job boards, or by having conversations with people who worked in an industry to hear about their experiences. Almost no research contributors mentioned deliberately accessing high-level statistics about employment demand: **improving the clarity and accessibility of labour market information that describes roles and transferable skills is an important way to support individual career transition choices.** That said, newcomers were often aware of labour market demand because of their immigration process. The Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs), for example, allow Canadian provinces and territories to use LMI to offer visas to newcomers who match local needs.



Research contributors named credential recognition, discrimination, and a lack of housing and settlement infrastructure as further barriers to finding a role. If anything, LMI-driven visas can create a misleading expectation of employment in a system that is not set up to take full advantage of newcomers' skills.¹²⁸

Summary of Strategies: Inclusive Reskilling

CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Financial Burden of Reskilling	Use prior learning assessments (PLAs) to acknowledge lived experience.	Educational Institutions	Gain more information about the practice of prior learning assessment and recognition through the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA): https://capla.ca/category/pla-resources/practitioners-resources/
	Partner reskilling opportunities with holistic supports, including childcare, subsidies, and scholarships.	Civil Society	
	Support civil society and community-led organizations that curate and disseminate information about affordable programs, scholarships, and other supports.	Public Sector	Learn more about financial assistance opportunities through: Indspire, "Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries and Scholarships," https://indspire.ca/programs/students/bursaries-scholarships/ Government of Canada, "Indigenous Bursaries Search Tool," https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1351185180120/1351685455328 Ottawa Community Foundation, "Black Canadian Scholarship Fund," https://www.ocf-fco.ca/grant-programs/Black-canadian-scholarship-fund/ Black Opportunity Fund, "Grants for Education and Health-focused initiatives" https://blackopportunityfund.ca/who-we-fund/ University of British Columbia, "Beyond Tomorrow Scholars Program" https://news.ubc.ca/2022/02/01/new-scholarship-program-supports-black-canadian-students-at-ubc/ Atlantic Immigrant Career Loan Fund, "About Us," https://aiclf.ca/

CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Employability following Reskilling	Create more, and support existing, work-integrated learning programs for career transitioners.	Educational Institutions	Consult resources provided by Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL Canada): https://cewilcanada.ca/CEWIL/CEWIL/Resources/Resources.aspx?hkey=578f8a62-d9f1-459e-9143-1ff8144bb441
	Improve the accessibility and usefulness of labour market information.	Civil Society	
		Public Sector	Visit eTalent Canada (ICTC) to learn more about labour market information, as well as work-integrated learning opportunities: www.etalentcanada.ca
		Private Sector	

128

Faun E. Rice and Trevor R. Quan, "Beyond 'Economic Immigration': Understanding the Role of Labor Market and Lifestyle Expectations in Technology Sector Newcomer Experiences in Canada," *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, June 9, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-023-01056-2>



CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Inclusive and Culturally Relevant Reskilling	Support community-led training organizations	Educational Institutions	Read the Association of Canadian Deans of Education, "Accord on Indigenous Education": https://csse-scee.ca/acde/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/08/Accord-on-Indigenous-Education.pdf
	Incorporate community-led resource centres and mentorship opportunities in large institutions.	Civil Society Public Sector	Learn about the University of Saskatchewan's initiative, "Indigenization and The University of Saskatchewan": https://teaching.usask.ca/curriculum/indigenization.php Consult the Government of Canada's resource for advancing Indigenous reconciliation, "Education for Reconciliation": https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524504501233/1557513602139 Read about York University's "Securing Black Futures: A National Partnership to Advance Youth Academic & Career Success": https://www.yorku.ca/edu/sbf/

Inclusive Safety Nets and Career Transition Risk: The Role of CERB

As discussed throughout Part II, housing insecurity, inflation, childcare costs, and the other realities of everyday life can make it difficult for workers interested in changing careers to take the leap to reskill or try something new. Employers and educational institutions play some role in reducing this burden. In addition, government and civil society offer important safety nets for career transitioners.

Research contributors talked about accessing lifelines and essential funding through this kind of program, while others told stories about falling through the cracks. For example, the Iqaluit focus group described the challenge of subsidized housing. One said, "Since we have family [in contrast to workers from the south], the government thinks we're okay. Thinks we don't need subsidized housing. But, when I'm not living in the unit, I'm living with my mom and my family. Six people in one house sometimes. We struggle to get housing units." Another participant from the same session commented, "I'm in education. I keep getting asked if I will go teach back home, but because my family lives there, I won't get [offered] a home. I am afraid to go back home because I won't have a place of my own." Meanwhile, an inclusion specialist detailed the compounding effects of a lack of access to childcare: "What we're seeing is that Black and minority women were even more left behind during the pandemic. And they're having an even harder time coming back to work... It's all related to the fact that we saw a lot of Black and minority women were not able to find childcare that was as easily accessible to them as it could have been to their white counterparts."



While an in-depth examination of all the safety nets offered to support an equitable recovery is beyond the scope of this paper, this section offers a snapshot of participant experiences with the emergency income replacement program put in place by the federal government at the onset of COVID.

The Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)

The Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) was introduced in March 2020 to provide urgent relief to Canadians due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike the country's long-standing Employment Insurance (EI) program, the CERB included self-employed, freelance, and gig economy workers, as well as people who lost work due to illness or any coronavirus-related reason other than quitting voluntarily.¹²⁹ Available from March 15 to September 26, 2020,¹³⁰ the CERB was designed to be as accessible as possible and was quickly heralded for being easy to access,¹³¹ unlike many other wage subsidy or replacement programs. As of the end of April 2020, a staggering 7.28M applicants to CERB were recorded—about one in five Canadians at the time.¹³² However, despite the program's best efforts, the CERB did not reach all laid-off workers equitably. A report from July 2020 noted that 13.4% of off-reserve Indigenous people were receiving the CERB, vs. 18.7% of non-Indigenous people, despite greater employment losses.¹³³ However, a later study using 2021 Census data concludes that "more than half of workers in the bottom three earnings deciles received CERB payments in 2020" and that rates of CERB uptake "were comparatively high among Indigenous and racialized workers."¹³⁴ Furthermore, there were disproportionate rates of newcomers among early CERB applicants,¹³⁵ possibly because migrant workers and newcomers were more likely to experience low job security during the pandemic (furthermore, newcomers may be more familiar with the federal government's digital application portals because of immigration process experience). In addition, unlike means-tested social assistance payments, accessing the CERB did not prevent newcomers from sponsoring family members to come to Canada.¹³⁶

Several research participants mentioned that they knew CERB existed but didn't know how to apply for it or had been afraid to apply for it because they felt they would have to pay it back. Unfortunately, many of the participants who reported these issues also reported experiencing homelessness during or after the pandemic. Others didn't quite qualify: an Indigenous research contributor in Regina said, "I lost my kitchen job. They closed it due to COVID. I didn't quite have the hours to get CERB payments. So it affected me big time."

129 Faun Rice, "The Global Turn to Cash Transfers," Information and Communications Technology Council, April 30, 2020, <https://medium.com/informationandcommunicationstechnologycouncil/the-global-turn-to-cash-transfers-200cd9d7acbf>

130 Katherine Scott and Trish Hennessy, "Canada Emergency Response Benefit: More than Just an Income Program," Future Skills Centre & Centre for Policy Alternatives, June 2023, https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2023/06/CERB_Final_June%2012%2C%202023.pdf

131 Vanmala Subramaniam, "So easy I thought it was fake: CRA's CERB system gets stellar reviews in first days of operation," National Post, April 8, 2020, <https://www.nationalpost.com/news/economy/so-easy-i-thought-it-was-fake-cra-cerb-system-gets-stellar-reviews-in-first-days-of-operation/wcm/64f4b5f1-2e2b-4e4a-af98-44364365a213>

132 Faun Rice, "The Global Turn to Cash Transfers," Information and Communications Technology Council, April 30, 2020, <https://medium.com/informationandcommunicationstechnologycouncil/the-global-turn-to-cash-transfers-200cd9d7acbf>

133 Dylan Robertson, "Federal benefit access rate far from equal: CERB rate lower among urban Indigenous population," Winnipeg Free Press, July 13, 2020, <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/special/coronavirus/cerb-rate-lower-among-urban-indigenous-population-ottawa-571749062.html>

134 Katherine Scott and Trish Hennessy, "Canada Emergency Response Benefit: More than Just an Income Program," Future Skills Centre & Centre for Policy Alternatives, June 2023, p. 28, https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2023/06/CERB_Final_June%2012%2C%202023.pdf

135 Government of Canada, "GBA+ Summary for Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan," last modified July 15, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/services/publications/economic-fiscal-snapshot/gba-summary-economic-response-plan.html>

136 Jolson Lim, "CERB eligibility expanded to part-time and seasonal workers, Trudeau says," iPolitics, April 15, 2020, <https://ipolitics.ca/2020/04/15/cerb-eligibility-expanded-to-part-time-and-seasonal-workers-trudeau-says/>



However, some participants did qualify for CERB and found it extremely helpful. One Winnipeg research contributor identifying as a Person of colour linked the CERB and career churn, commenting,

“I made more on CERB than I did on my regular paycheck. I think for a lot of people, it shocked them how the government said to survive, you need at least \$2,000 every two weeks. And they're finding out that I've been like raising a family of four on half of that. I think that's what caused a big part of the great resignation, just because people were stunned and like, this is what the average person makes. And I've lowered myself to only making that, so it's interesting to see that because people are recognizing their own self-worth.”

Furthermore, early evidence has suggested that for people who did access the CERB, the program allowed them to pursue education and skill-building opportunities that they would not have otherwise been able to. In a survey of 1,500 CERB recipients in November 2022 conducted by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives,

- ▶ 37% of respondents “pursued additional education or training explicitly in support of their career goals, including taking up a new career (41%), improving their standing in an existing career, 37%, or securing another job or ‘side hustle’ (36%).” This proportion was higher for Indigenous respondents (50%), racialized respondents (48%), and immigrants (46%).
- ▶ Primary caregivers and parents reported receiving essential support from CERB.
- ▶ 62% of respondents said that the CERB “gave them time to think about the career or job they wanted” and that “these sentiments were particularly high among people with disabilities and members of racialized communities who continue to experience systemic barriers to employment.”¹³⁷
- ▶ Respondents from racialized and Indigenous communities “were more likely than the overall average to use CERB funds to pay down debt or to invest in savings.”¹³⁸

Research contributors who spoke with ICTC and who didn’t access CERB had often received essential aid from a front-line community-serving organization. Their experiences underscore that it is important for policymakers to complement top-down support approaches like the CERB with funding for community-led organizations. One Black-led organization described the reason for their creation: “[We were] developed due to the recognition that Black communities were struggling to access philanthropy dollars.” They took a trust-based approach to grant-making, engaging Black communities as “experts” who “know what their community needs.” They did a needs assessment with other Black-led charities and non-profits in Canada and found that most of them did not have more than six months of funding but that they had provided much-needed support for their communities during COVID. When asked what might make this research more useful to them, they commented that supporting community-led organizations with the expertise and connections to serve their constituents was essential to the research topic.

137

Katherine Scott and Trish Hennessy, “Canada Emergency Response Benefit: More than Just an Income Program,” Future Skills Centre & Centre for Policy Alternatives, June 2023, p. 20, https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2023/06/CERB_Final_June%2012%2C%202023.pdf

138

Ibid. p. 13.





Entrepreneurship as a Career Transition

Entrepreneurship, where people exit conventional employment to go into businesses for themselves, is both a type of career transition and a key component of economic development and economic self-determination in communities such as First Nations in Canada. Entrepreneurship can also emerge out of “survival” side projects and a desire to build financial sustainability. Statistics Canada estimated there were 66,880 Black-owned businesses in Canada in 2018 (2.1% of all businesses); the majority were owned by immigrants (61.4%) and men (70.4%).¹³⁹ In 2022, the Canadian Survey on Business Conditions reported that there were 17,417 First Nations, Métis, or Inuit-owned businesses (1.7% of businesses in Canada).¹⁴⁰ During the pandemic, in 2021, Statistics Canada found that “businesses majority-owned by visible minorities [were] more likely [than private sector businesses overall] to expect obstacles maintaining sufficient cash flow or managing debt.”¹⁴¹ In the most recent reporting cycle for the Canadian Survey on Business Conditions (Quarter 3 of 2023), First Nations, Métis, and Inuit-owned businesses, immigrant-owned businesses, and “visible minority-owned businesses” were all more likely to experience cost-related challenges than the survey average.¹⁴²

The following figures show the obstacles the Indigenous, Black and racialized communities and newcomer-owned businesses reported facing in the Canadian Survey on Business Conditions from 2019 to the present. The number in each cell represents the difference between the percentage of respondents who selected each obstacle within that group and the percentage of all businesses who selected each obstacle. For example, the sample of Indigenous-owned businesses surveyed had 5.3 percentage points more businesses than the whole sample, selecting “retaining skills employees” as an example. The heat map shows, in descending order, the types of obstacles that Indigenous-owned businesses were more likely to report facing over the last three years. Notably, Indigenous-owned businesses were, in general, more likely to face nearly all of the obstacles listed.

139 “Study: Black Business Owners in Canada,” *The Daily*, February 22, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230222/dq230222a-eng.htm>

140 Statistics Canada, “Indigenous-Owned Businesses in Canada: Confronting Challenges, Forecasting Growth,” January 16, 2023, <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/2762-indigenous-owned-businesses-canada-confronting-challenges-forecasting-growth>

141 Kiran Toor and Marina Smailes, “Impact of COVID-19 on Businesses Majority-Owned by Visible Minorities in Canada, Second Quarter of 2021,” Statistics Canada, June 14, 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2021001/article/00026-eng.htm>

142 Statistics Canada, “The Daily – Canadian Survey on Business Conditions, Third Quarter 2023,” August 28, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230828/dq230828a-eng.htm>



BUSINESS OBSTACLES OVER THE NEXT 3 MONTHS

Annual average of quarterly difference between FNMI-owned businesses and all businesses

	2021	2022	2023	Avg
Retaining skilled employees	5.3	5.7	9.9	7.0
Recruiting skilled employees	4.9	3.4	8.0	5.4
Transportation costs	8.9	4.9	1.1	4.6
Maintaining sufficient cash flow or managing debt	1.8	9.2	0.2	4.0
Obtaining financing	3.8	3.9	4.2	3.9
Shortage of labour force	2.0	2.1	7.0	3.7
Cost of insurance	0.9	2.8	6.5	3.4
Fluctuations in consumer demand	3.9	3.6	1.2	2.9
Difficulty acquiring inputs, products or supplies from abroad	3.4	1.2	3.3	2.5
Shortage of space or equipment	3.0	1.1	2.8	2.3
Maintaining inventory levels	3.2	0.2	2.7	2.1
Difficulty acquiring inputs, products or supplies domestically	0.9	3.6	1.3	2.0
Increasing competition	2.4	1.7	-0.7	1.3
Insufficient demand for goods or services offered	0.7	1.8	0.7	1.1
Challenges related to exporting goods and services	-0.6	1.3	0.8	0.5
Attracting new or returning customers	-1.2	0.8	0.6	0.2
Rising cost of inputs	-0.3	-0.1	-1.7	-0.6

Figure 10: Data Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Business Conditions (CSBC) 2021-2023. Analysis, ICTC. Note: each year takes the average of four quarters of data. Select data points were not of adequate quality to include. Total averages take an average of all available data points rather than an average of the three annual averages. Data quality does not permit separation between different Indigenous communities.

Figure 11 offers the same analysis for two groups: racialized business owners (non-Indigenous) and immigrant-owned businesses. Interestingly, the obstacles most likely to be encountered by racialized and immigrant business owners appear to align in many circumstances: for both, increasing competition and attracting and retaining customers are the most salient. For all Indigenous, racialized, and newcomer-owned businesses, obtaining financing, and maintaining cash flow and managing debt are 4–5.5 percentage points more likely to be a challenge than for the average business. However, for visible minority and immigrant-owned businesses, attracting and retaining skilled talent, and navigating labour market challenges are less of a common challenge than for the average business.



BUSINESS OBSTACLES: AVERAGE VISIBLE MINORITY VS AVERAGE IMMIGRANT

	BUSINESS OBSTACLES				BUSINESS OBSTACLES			
	Racialized, non-indigenous business owners				Immigrant-owned			
	2021	2022	2023	Avg	2021	2022	2023	Avg
Increasing competition	7.2	8.5	7.3	7.7	7.1	7.8	8.3	7.7
Attracting new or returning customers	8.2	6.1	5.6	6.5	6.2	4.0	5.7	5.2
Insufficient demand for goods or services offered	8.2	4.9	5.8	6.3	5.7	4.0	5.5	5.1
Obtaining financing	6.4	4.8	5.0	5.4	4.2	4.4	5.1	4.6
Maintaining sufficient cash flow or managing debt	6.5	4.5	3.7	4.9	4.5	3.3	2.8	3.5
Fluctuations in consumer demand	5.8	3.0	2.4	3.7	3.9	2.8	2.5	3.1
Cost of insurance	2.8	1.3	-0.9	1.0	0.8	1.6	-0.3	0.7
Challenges related to exporting goods and services	0.5	0.9	0.3	0.6	1.5	0.8	0.2	0.9
Shortage of space or equipment	0.9	-1.2	0.6	0.1	0.0	-0.8	-0.5	-0.4
Rising cost of inputs	-0.1	-0.4	0.7	0.1	0.7	1.1	0.8	0.2
Retaining skilled employees	-1.1	0.6	0.3	-0.1	-2.1	-0.8	-3.4	-2.1
Maintaining inventory levels	-1.6	-1.7	1.5	-0.6	-1.7	-1.1	0.3	-0.8
Difficulty acquiring inputs, products or supplies from abroad	-1.0	-2.9	-1.7	-1.9	-1.0	-1.7	-1.1	-1.3
Transportation costs	-1.1	-3.0	-3.0	-2.5	0.7	0.3	-0.2	0.2
Shortage of labour force	-5.2	-1.6	-2.9	-3.2	-5.2	-1.5	-3.8	-3.5
Difficulty acquiring inputs products or supplies domestically	-6.1	-4.6	-1.0	-3.7	-5.4	-2.0	-0.8	-2.5
Recruiting skilled employees	-5.7	-4.3	-4.4	-4.8	-5.7	-4.2	-5.7	-5.2

Figure 11: Data Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Business Conditions (CSBC) 2021-2023. Analysis, ICTC.
 Note: each year takes the average of four quarters of data



Challenges with obtaining financing were echoed by several research contributors. One who had experience working on Truth and Reconciliation with the private sector commented, “One of the biggest challenges to dealing with credit unions and banks is the hesitancy to fund folks who show low profitability or financial expertise... I think the other piece is collateral, where Indigenous folks, unfortunately, due to the history of this country, have not been able to build land collateral in the same way settlers have.” They advocated for more community-based investment hubs that could use their knowledge of the community and local market while offering business training. Another professional working with a provincial government in a related area voiced the same sentiment, saying that the best way to increase access to capital for Indigenous entrepreneurs “is through Indigenous-run financial institutions that will support Indigenous organizations.” In Canada, Indigenous entrepreneurs have reported experiencing discriminatory lending practices and significant challenges in attracting capital for their businesses.¹⁴³

In this study and in the literature,¹⁴⁴ racialized contributors also relayed challenges related to raising capital. A study using data from the Kauffman Firm Survey and administrative data on credit scores highlights the substantial challenges faced by Black entrepreneurs in the US in securing loans, revealing persistent disparities in the startup landscape. Despite narrowing gaps in later-stage capital injections over time, initial funding differences persist, hindering the growth of Black-owned enterprises. Strikingly, even after adjusting for credit scores and founder wealth differences, Black startups consistently report higher levels of loan denials and an overall unmet need for capital compared to white-owned startups: notably, industry differences, goals for growth, and type of business fail to explain these racial disparities.¹⁴⁵

Another challenge related to entrepreneurship is awareness of funding opportunities and other small business programs.¹⁴⁶ Clarity about how entrepreneurial income interacts with other types of funding programs is also key. A staff member from a newcomer-serving NGO in Alberta described working with clients who were interested in starting small businesses in areas like catering. They said a lack of clarity from organizations like the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) about how small quantities of earned income would impact things like employment insurance or from affordable housing providers could “leave people paralyzed because they are worried about ending up in a worse place than they are now. If I gain \$500 of income a month, will I lose \$300 of government support?” They said that when they went to organizations to ask for clarity on such policies, they rarely got an answer at all, and transparency about how entrepreneurship interacts with benefits would go a long way toward supporting newcomers to sidestep “the systemic barriers that make traditional employment hard to access for people.”

143 Indigenous Leadership in Technology: Understanding Access and Opportunities in British Columbia,” First Nations Technology Council, Information and Communications Technology Council, Reciprocal Consulting Inc., 2022, Canada.

144 Bassirou Gueye, “Black Business Owners in Canada,” Statistics Canada, February 22, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2023001-eng.htm>

145 Robert Fairlie, Alicia Robb, and David T. Robinson, “Black and White: Access to Capital Among Minority-Owned Start-Ups,” *Management Science* 68, no. 4 (April 2022): 2397–2398, <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2021.3998>

146 Bassirou Gueye, “Black Business Owners in Canada,” Statistics Canada, February 22, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2023001-eng.htm>



The differences between Figures 10 and 11 also highlight several key issues that might be distinct for Indigenous-owned businesses. High transportation costs and difficulty recruiting and retaining talent, for example, may be related to the physical and digital infrastructure available in many Indigenous communities. While economic development is not the central focus of this paper, the ways in which physical and digital infrastructure support (or inhibit) career mobility and advancement were raised by participants throughout this research.

Many rural, remote, northern, and Indigenous communities still lack access to the minimum broadband connectivity set by the Government of Canada at 50/10 Mbps (download/upload speeds). A 2021 Auditor General of Canada report that aimed to measure progress on internet affordability and quality found that 99.3% of urban households in Canada had access to minimum broadband speeds. However, only 59.5% of rural and remote households had access to the internet at target speeds. This percentage dropped to 42.9% for households on First Nations reserves in Canada.¹⁴⁷ Throughout this study, many participants described how a lack of affordable physical and/or digital infrastructure circumscribed their ability to direct their careers. This was true for participants in remote settings, as well as some for whom inflation had created high costs of internet or transportation in urban areas. For example, an Indigenous job seeker in Toronto commented that their reliance on non-internet-based communications meant that “a lot of the time, I don’t hear about an opportunity until it’s too late.” When they use community centre job boards or other physical resources, “the barrier is that word doesn’t get out quick enough and fast enough to the community and to the people that need it.”

Inclusive Safety Nets, Economic Development, and Digital Infrastructure

CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Inclusive Safety Nets	Use the CERB as a case study to examine who was missed, why, and how to avoid similar cracks in future.	Civil Society Public Sector	Learn more about CERB through Open Canada, “Canada Emergency Response Benefit Statistics”: https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/94906755-1cb9-4c2d-aaa6-bf365f3d4de8
Economic Development & Entrepreneurship	Continue to improve access to affordable digital and physical infrastructure in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities.	Public Sector Civil Society Educational Institutions	Read the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action: https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf Learn more about building broadband connectivity for First Nations communities through the First Mile Connectivity Consortium: http://firstmile.ca/

147

Office of the Auditor General of Canada, “Connectivity in Rural and Remote Areas,” Report 2, 2023, https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/att_e_44225.html



CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Equitable Economic Development & Entrepreneurship	Support community-led financing hubs and businesses.	Private Sector	Black Opportunity Fund, https://Blackopportunityfund.ca/whats-up/
	Improve awareness of funding programs, how benefits interact with funding programs and income from entrepreneurship.	Public Sector Civil Society	National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association (NACCA), https://nacca.ca/about/ Métis Financial Corporation of BC, "Empowering Métis Entrepreneurs," https://mfcbc.ca/
Inclusive Safety Nets	Support community-led front-line service provision organizations.	Private Sector	Canada Helps, "Support Black-led Charities," https://www.canadahelps.org/en/support-black-led-charities/
		Public Sector	Canada Helps, "Donate to Indigenous Charities," https://www.canadahelps.org/en/explore/charities/category/indigenous-peoples/
		Civil Society	Canada Helps, "Charities for Refugees and New Canadians," https://www.canadahelps.org/en/explore/charities/category/social-services/sub-category/new-to-canada/

(i) Note: There are numerous front-line service provision organizations across Canada. This list is a tiny snapshot, and not representative of the full diversity of organizations that exist. To support front-line service provision organizations, relevant parties should do research about community-led groups making a difference in their local region.





PART III

Career Advancement

While Part II of this study focused on career transitions that require a reskilling or transition to a different industry or occupation, Part III will focus on career advancement: internal transitions within an organization or progressions to higher positions at different organizations without necessarily “reinventing” one’s skills or career. In this study, ICTC asked research participants about the “ability to advance,” “career progress,” decisions about building on skillsets, and the support available or needed to achieve career goals. To this end, the following section discusses the barriers people encounter when working to advance in their careers. ICTC explored the challenges racialized and newcomer research contributors face regarding career progression, the reasons people have for wanting—or not wanting—to advance in their careers, and what managers, workplaces, educational institutions, and policymakers can do to support equitable career advancement.

What is Career Advancement?

While career advancement can mean different things to different people, generally it can be understood as upward mobility or positive progression of one’s career.¹⁴⁸ Advancement can include promotions in job title, improved pay, expanded skill sets, and vertical or lateral assignments to positions of increased responsibility or visibility within a particular organization. “Advancement” is also generally associated with a value judgment on improved opportunities and the nature of the job or task progression or transition. For many, a sense of progress or improvement in one’s position or personal growth is a key defining factor to their advancement.

Like career mobility, advancement is important insurance against task or role automation. According to findings from the ICTC Employer Survey, 30% of respondents predicted the “replacement or significant reduction” of specific roles in their organizations over the next five to ten years due to efficient technologies. These roles included data entry, customer service, accounting, administration, and manual labour. Other than accounting, the types of roles listed were typically entry-level. With entry-level jobs being susceptible to automation, workers need to be well-positioned to advance and equitably supported to grow in their careers. Career advancement not only ensures greater job security but also fosters the professional development needed to thrive in roles less susceptible to automation.

That being said, career advancement is multi-faceted: it is impacted by the desire of the individual to advance, the opportunities available in a workplace, decision-making processes, and more. Relatedly, a lack of diversity and inclusion in a workplace can create a hostile or unwelcoming work environment for Black, Indigenous, and racialized workers, impacting an individual’s desire to advance in that environment, as well as to whom the opportunities are available.¹⁴⁹

148 Jerome Adams, “Issues in the Management of Careers,” in Robert Morrison and Jerome Adams *Contemporary Career Development Issues*, 2009, Routledge

149 ADP Canada, “Canadians believe workplaces still have work to do when it comes to diversity and inclusion,” 2021, <https://www.adp.ca/-/media/adpca/redesign2019/pdf/q2-insights-dei.pdf?rev=60386eb69eb541648ba1b263940725af>



A diversity of backgrounds, racial communities, and cultures has been identified as an important organizational characteristic for equitable career advancement opportunities for racialized peoples across Canada. Unfortunately, racialized people make up only a small proportion of management, leadership, and decision-making roles. As of 2023, only 14.5% of public and private senior manager positions in Canada were held by racialized peoples,¹⁵⁰ and across the economy, women only held 39% of management roles.¹⁵¹ The representation of people from Black communities is far lower, making up only 1.6% of public and private senior manager positions.¹⁵² Indigenous Peoples are similarly underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles in Canada: only 3.1% of legislative and senior manager roles in Canada are held by Indigenous Peoples, 1.1% being Métis and 0.1% being Inuit. In comparison, Black Peoples and Indigenous Peoples make up 4.1% and 3.97% of the total Canadian workforce, respectively.¹⁵³ Diverse representation in leadership and decision-making opens the door to opportunities for meaningful career progression.¹⁵⁴ This was echoed by interviewees and focus group attendees engaged in this study, who felt they had greater opportunities for promotion within diverse organizations.

In the context of career advancement, the ultimate goal is that individuals across diverse groups have the freedom to exercise greater control over their lives in relation to what they value being or doing rather than feeling stuck or operating out of survival.¹⁵⁵ Workplaces, educational institutions, policymakers and civil society must make dedicated efforts to improve the advancement opportunities for people of racialized communities.

COVID-19's Impact on Advancement

Research contributors felt that COVID-19 compounded several barriers to advancement by decreasing professional networking opportunities and lessening access to senior management.

The shift to remote work arrangements at the beginning of the pandemic made it “harder to build connections.” One interviewee said it is a “major disadvantage” that the “process of networking is delayed in the online sector. You need to make more of an effort trying to network with people online.” For racialized workers and newcomers just starting out in their careers or seeking promotions, “there are opportunities [to network and build connection], but you have to know how to find them.” As a newcomer in Quebec shared, “Work from home is challenging because I think I need to showcase my physical presence.” Beyond networking and promotion opportunities, newcomers questioned how to build their resume and get Canadian work experience, and racialized interviewees felt they had lost two years of opportunities to show up and build their skills.

- 150 Statistics Canada, “Visible minority by occupation, highest level of education and generation status: Canada, provinces and territories,” Table: 98-10-0330-01, May 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl/en/tv.action?pid=9810033001>
- 151 Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), “Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing tech’s untapped potential.” Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, <https://www.digitalthinktankictc.com/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy>
- 152 Statistics Canada, “Occupation unit group by labour force status, highest level of education, age and gender: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts, Table: 98-10-0990-01,” Census 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl/en/tv.action?pid=9810044901>
- 153 Statistics Canada, Census 2021. Racialized peoples representation found in Census Data Table: 98-10-0330-01; Indigenous representation found in Census Data Table: 98-10-0587
- 154 Michelle Zhong and Tanvi Shetty, “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Responsive Career Pathways,” Future Skills Centre, November 2021, <https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/FSC-RCP-DEI-EN.pdf>
- 155 Jenny Brimrose and Alan Brown, “Career Progression and Development: The Role for Career Guidance and Counseling,” Handbook of Career Development, January 2014, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4614-9460-7_11



For many, the labour market and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 meant advancement opportunities disappeared altogether or career goals had to be put on hold. Results from a Canadian Workplace Culture Index survey in May 2021 found that racialized Canadians were three times more likely to have lost their job as a result of COVID-19.¹⁵⁶ Labour gaps widened, and employers required people to “cover more area” without the accompanying title or pay improvements. This resulted in frustration among employees: one newcomer commented that their increased job responsibilities during COVID “felt like a demotion.” Interviewees often cited holds on promotions or raises during COVID or their workplaces offering short-term contract renewals instead of permanent positions or promotions. While there is a lack of empirical evidence, during the initial impact of COVID-19, the sentiment among research participants was that the general pace of progression slowed, and it became harder to advance in workplaces where businesses had scaled back or required closure.

While many experienced increased challenges to their career progression, other interviewees found opportunities to progress their careers during COVID. For individuals who retained their employment, the pandemic provided an opportunity for workers to upskill or retrain. A general population survey of 1,500 Canadians found that 10% of employed Canadians enrolled in formal/informal education/training while in the pandemic, either for their current industry or with the intention to transition (see Part II for a discussion of the push and pull factors for career transitions during COVID-19).¹⁵⁷ In other cases, the prevalence of people leaving their jobs during the pandemic (as discussed in Part II) opened spaces for people to move into more senior roles. As stated by an interviewee in Montreal, “Because of people leaving, I was able to get a higher position,” and one individual shared they didn’t really “get a promotion” but were “pushed up higher” through a combination of more senior people leaving and new hires coming in below.

Despite this, many research contributors also faced socioeconomic barriers during the pandemic, which kept them from advancing in their careers. For example, many interviewees found themselves forced to work survival jobs as opposed to seeking training opportunities or advancing to higher positions. For example, one Black interviewee from Montreal related dropping out of college during COVID to work in food delivery services to help support his family.

Beyond COVID-19: Factors Influencing Racialized and Newcomer Career Advancement

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, racialized individuals faced challenges securing permanent, long-term positions where advancement would be possible. An interviewee in BC identifying as a person of colour shared their previous work experience in a term role, where “there was no way to transition into a formal role, they [the employer] didn’t give me an employee number, and I didn’t have access to any of the internal positions.” A newcomer advocacy organization in Northern Canada commented, “There’s an unconscious bias. There are those who think we’re not capable enough. We’re not competent enough to hold positions of responsibility.”

156 The Canadian Workplace Culture Index, “2021 Survey Results and Insights Release,” October 15, 2021, <https://www.cultureindex.io/2021/10/18/2021-survey-results-and-insights-release/>

157 Michael Monopoli, “The Great Promotion? How the pandemic changed the landscape of working Canadians,” October 6, 2022, Abacus Data, <https://abacusdata.ca/the-great-promotion/>



Research participants raised concerns about having to work harder than their non-equity-seeking counterparts to earn promotions, which can lead to feeling stuck in a job or stagnant in one's career growth. A founder of a Black-led EDI consulting organization described this feeling as the "sense that if I leave, I would need to put in another ten years to get the same opportunities."

For newcomers to Canada, financial barriers and lengthy certification processes hinder career advancement. As outlined in Part II, the general experience for newcomers arriving in Canada is that job placement programs are for entry-level positions, or newcomers are required to complete Canadian education or certification to work in their field, posing a significant financial barrier. Interviewees that ICTC spoke to virtually shared that "the biggest barrier is qualification," and often they could not afford another "few thousand dollars" to go to college in Canada due to other financial responsibilities that need to be met, as well as already having student loans from bachelor's degrees or other education in their home countries. The reality for many of the individuals consulted for this study was that "it's hard to focus on career when you're still trying to put food on the table."

Finances aside, many newcomers find themselves deterred from gaining additional certifications or getting their credentials recognized because the process is "long and rigorous." As shared by a newcomer in Calgary, certification processes "take immigrants a long time to complete... some immigrants don't even bother doing it." When it comes to questions of advancement, the persisting barriers newcomers to Canada face, such as foreign education and credential recognition, non-Canadian work experience, and other socioeconomic challenges, result in struggles breaking out of entry-level or "survival jobs" into higher-level opportunities.

Classifying Challenges and Barriers to Advancement

Barriers to advancement can manifest in a multitude of ways and are experienced differently from individual to individual, between and among groups, and within organizations and institutions. For the purposes of this report, barriers and challenges have been classified into three categories:

- 1 ▶ Individual-level challenges and barriers
- 2 ▶ Group-level challenges and barriers
- 3 ▶ Organizational and institutional challenges and barriers

Individual-level challenges and barriers are experienced psychologically, socially, and physically, and may include experiences of high stress, tokenism, self-limiting beliefs, overcompensation, isolation, and a lack of motivation. Barriers at the group level may be experienced as exclusion from informal and formal networks, stereotyping, a lack of social support, and the intersection of perceived social status and power. At the organizational level, barriers can include access to or lack of mentorship opportunities, functional segregation, "pigeon-holing," low career plateauing, and limited opportunities for advancement, also known as the "glass ceiling."¹⁵⁸

158

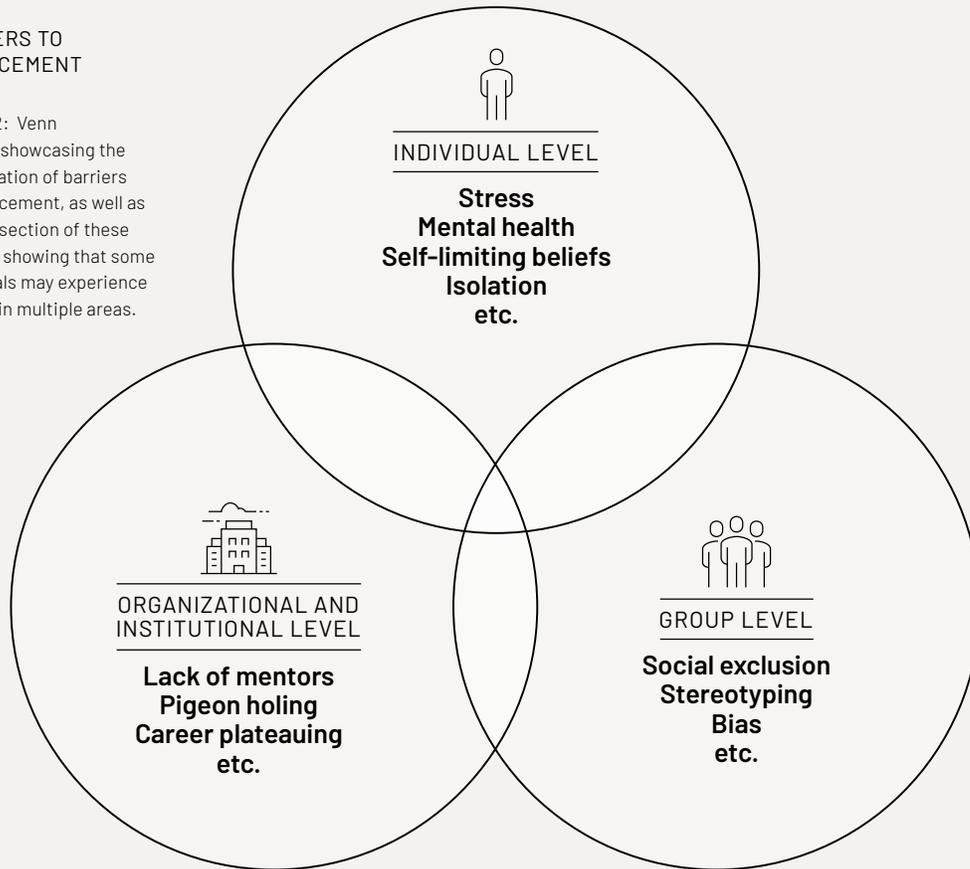
Jo Evans Coleman, "Barriers to career mobility/advancement by African-American and Caucasian female administrators in Minnesota organizations: A perception or reality?", *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association* (San Diego, CA), April 1998. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED423590.pdf>



While barriers can be grouped into individual, group, and organizational levels, it is important to note that **barriers to advancement do not exist in isolation** (Figure 12). The experiences of individuals are complex, and their perspectives and opportunities for career progression are shaped as they navigate through multiple intersecting forms of social and structural challenges.¹⁵⁹ For instance, systemic issues, including discrimination and biases, poverty, lower access to education, and inadequate job training opportunities, tend to interact with and amplify these challenges.¹⁶⁰

BARRIERS TO ADVANCEMENT

Figure 12: Venn diagram showcasing the classification of barriers to advancement, as well as the intersection of these barriers, showing that some individuals may experience barriers in multiple areas.



Just as barriers to advancement are experienced across different levels, they must be addressed at different levels. For instance, individuals should not bear sole responsibility for addressing barriers experienced at the individual level. Instead, individual efforts should be paired with group-level efforts (e.g. unbiased management and supportive colleagues), organizational efforts (e.g., EDI policies), and institutional efforts (e.g., government programming). While efforts must be collaborative, classifying barriers and challenges into specific levels enables the development of targeted strategies. Building upon this, the following subsections outline individual, group-level, and organizational challenges to career advancement for equity-deserving communities and provide strategies to best support equitable career advancement.

159 Chia Longman and Katrien De Graeve, "From Happy to Critical Diversity: Intersectionality as a Paradigm for Gender and Diversity Studies," *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 2014, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 33-39. <https://doi.org/10.11116/j/divegendstud.1.1.0033>

160 Erik Henningsmoen, Todd Legere, Heather McGeer, Justin Ratcliffe, "Equitable Recovery and New Frontiers: Understanding Demand and Supply in Manufacturing, Construction, Retail, and Hospitality," April 2023, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), <https://www.digitalthinktankictc.com/reports/equitable-recovery-and-new-frontiers>



Individual or Social Challenges for Inclusive Career Advancement

The following subsections cover challenges that equity-deserving workers feel at an individual level and are symptomatic of intersectional systemic challenges placed on racialized Canadians and newcomers in the workforce. For instance, pressure at work can be more challenging for single parents or caregivers who are not able to unwind at the end of a workday due to family responsibilities. Despite these challenges being felt at an individual level, employers and civil society have a role to play in mitigating these challenges to ensure equitable career advancement pathways are available to all.

CHALLENGE

Mental Health, Emotional Labour, Experiences of Racism, and Work Performance

Mental health during or resulting from COVID-19 had a significant impact on people's career advancement, particularly for equity-deserving groups who already faced a greater emotional tax (such as additional pressures and challenges due to discrimination) at work prior to COVID.¹⁶¹ An Indigenous research contributor in Ottawa commented, "Your brain stops wanting to advance, but you get comfortable where you are currently at." In this interviewee's experience, it took two years to realize she felt like she was stuck, and the desire to advance grew out of "getting back to wanting better for oneself." Research highlights a positive correlation between mental health and work performance. While this means that employees who have positive mental health tend to perform well, it also means that employees who are struggling with mental well-being and burnout tend to also experience adverse effects on job performance, and ultimately, career progression.¹⁶² For another First Nations participant in Ontario, "COVID affected my mental health to the point of burnout. I could have gone on to become executive director, but I was so exhausted and burnt out I had to step away." Like many who transitioned careers during COVID, the pandemic's impact on career progression provided time to reflect on the emotional labour that had been involved in their work: the same participant commented, "I felt I needed to shift or pivot toward a job with less emotional labour."

Emotional labour is directly linked to one's own emotions and those of others and how these emotions impact the social dynamics of a workplace, organizational performance, and the overall happiness of a work environment.¹⁶³ Importantly, emotional labour is often required to keep a positive and cohesive work environment. As described by Psychologist Dr. Alicia Grandey of Penn State: "Emotional labour, like physical labour, is effortful and fatiguing when done repeatedly all day long and can be costly in terms of performance errors and job burnout."¹⁶⁴ The consequences of increased emotional labour are worsened by surface acting, which may include faking or suppressing emotions at work.¹⁶⁵

161 Dnika, J. Travis, Jennifer Thorpe-Moscon, and Courtney McCluney, "Emotional Tax: How Black Women and Men Pay More at Work and How Leaders Can Take Action," 2016, Catalyst.

162 Thomas Wright, Douglas Bonett, and Dennis Sweeney, "Mental health and work performance: Results of a longitudinal field study," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, December 1993, <https://bpspsychub.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.2044-8325.1993.tb00539.x>

163 Alicia Grandey, James Diefendorff, and Deborah E. Rupp, (2012) define emotional labour as "the study of how emotion regulation of oneself and others influences social dynamics at work, which has implications for performance and well being in a wide range of occupations and organizations," in *Emotional Labour in the 21st Century: Diverse Perspectives on Emotion Regulation at Work*, 1st ed., Routledge.

164 Alicia Grandey, "What is Emotional Labour?" Department of Psychology, PennState College of the Liberal Arts, 2023, <https://weld.la.psu.edu/what-is-emotional-labor/>

165 Xiaoxiao Hu and Junqi Shi, "Employees' surface acting in interactions with leaders and peers," *Journal of Organizational Behaviour* Vol.36, no. 8, 2015, pp. 1132-1152. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26610496>



The work of “emotional labour” tends to fall disproportionately on women and racialized people.¹⁶⁶ In addition, published literature and firsthand conversations with racialized people in mid-senior-level roles suggest that equity-deserving groups face disproportionate performance expectations,¹⁶⁷ particularly around supporting their organization’s EDI policies and programs, whether directly or indirectly. An EDI specialist commented, “There is extra work being put on marginalized communities. I am doing my regular job, but now I need to do this extra work to make you a better employer.” As noted by another research contributor, this extra work goes beyond just emotional labour to greater levels of work and performance expectations intellectually and physically across job types.

When speaking to this issue, study participants spoke to some of their reservations about taking on responsibility for EDI work:

“Why would I do this emotional labour to help my organization? Because they don’t help me...”

“[The organization] can’t be called biased or racist because we have this person, but when it doesn’t suit an agenda, this person is totally excluded.”

Ensuring that employees aren’t called upon to be the lone representative for their entire group is one step employers can take to reduce the emotional and intellectual burden on racialized employees.¹⁶⁸

CHALLENGE

“Quiet Quitting”: A Coping Mechanism Against Disproportionate Work Expectations

First coined in 2009 and becoming commonplace terminology in 2021, “quiet quitting” is the current term that defines ceasing to be fully committed to one’s job and doing “just enough” to meet the requirements of one’s job description.¹⁶⁹ This term can be contentious, as many definitions describe a lack of full commitment to one’s job when many workers are pursuing a work-life balance, setting boundaries, and simply “completing the tasks you’re supposed to complete within the time that you’re paid to do them.”¹⁷⁰ One research contributor noted that for Black and racialized communities, “quiet quitting” can be related to “covering,” where individuals downplay aspects of their identity in an attempt to fit in or avoid standing out.¹⁷¹

One interviewee suggested that the concept of quiet quitting penalizes the progression of those who do not “go above and beyond,” as it overlooks the realities of individuals who have responsibilities beyond the workplace, such as parenting, school, or secondary jobs, to make ends meet.

166 Catherine W. Berheide, Megan A. Carpenter, and David A. Cotter, “Teaching College in the Time of COVID-19: Gender and Race Differences in Faculty Emotional Labour,” *Sex Roles* Vol 86, pp. 441-455, March 2022. - <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s1199-021-01271-0>

167 Costas Cavouridis and Kevin Lang, “Discrimination and Worker Evaluation,” National Bureau of Economics Research, October 2015, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w21612>

168 Kara Sherrer, “What is Tokenism, and why does it matter in the workplace?”, Vanderbilt University, February 26, 2018, <https://business.vanderbilt.edu/news/2018/02/26/tokenism-in-the-workplace/>

170 Thalmus Mahand and Cam Caldwell, “Quiet Quitting – Causes and Opportunities,” *Business and Management Research*, Vol 12, No. 1, January 2023, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Cam-Caldwell/publication/366990489_Quiet_Quitting_-_Causes_and_Opportunities/links/63bd727b097c7832caa6b182/Quiet-Quitting-Causes-and-Opportunities.pdf

171 Greg Rosalsky and Alina Selyukh, “The economics behind ‘quiet quitting’ - and what we should call it instead,” NPR, September 13, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2022/09/13/1122059402/the-economics-behind-quiet-quitting-and-what-we-should-call-it-instead>



The pressure to consistently surpass standards without considering the broader context of one's life can lead to burnout and diminished morale. In fact, the common definition of employee engagement as the voluntary exertion of “discretionary effort”¹⁷² embeds the over-performance paradigm into baseline expectations.

STRATEGIES

Counteracting Quiet Quitting and Removing the Burden from Equity-Deserving Communities

Research has found multiple reasons for the “quiet quitting” phenomenon, including employer lack of commitment to career development, failure to value employees or empower employee autonomy, and a decline in organizational trust by an employee.¹⁷³ In 2022, Gallup found that quiet quitting is ultimately a symptom of poor management,¹⁷⁴ and research participants referred to poor people management as a foundation for challenges in progressing one’s career. One EDI specialist noted, “Even if you have a leader who cares, clearly that mindset is not trickling down. It takes a while to trickle down to those who are impacted by these things.”

Research participants called for increased awareness around factors that lead to burnout, particularly for Black individuals:

“Black people, for all of our lives, we're told to work like twice as hard as our white counterparts, and that's something that's ingrained in our mindset. And that's why burnout happens because Black people will just work...if in your head you're like, I have to work twice as hard, so you're always working harder. You're always saying yes.”

Managers need to know that this happens and why to be able to recognize when a Black or other racialized employee is doing more work than their white colleagues and realize when something needs to change. As summarized by one interviewee:

“[Black employees] need to be in an environment where your boss or your supervisor is able to say, ‘Okay, wait, this person already has a lot. I'm not going to ask them to do more work just because I know they'll say yes.’ And a Black person will most likely say yes because they're like, ‘Okay, I have to prove myself right because that's what I've been told my whole life.’”

Reducing the emotional toll on equity-deserving groups requires intentional and authentic work. A research participant who works in human resources outlined the balance in being able to “connect with [diverse groups] and their real experiences and their real voice[s], but it takes effort to build trust and confidence that this information won’t be used against them.” Many participants referred to a hesitancy to bring up issues in their workplaces for fears that divulging sensitive information would come back to “bite them” or would influence the politics of “in groups and out groups” within their teams. To this end, an interviewee who works with Black communities discussed the importance of a “neutral third party to work through the fears, barriers, etc., that are preventing them from working like their best selves.”

172 “Discretionary Effort,” Aubrey Daniels International, Retrieved January 5, 2024, <https://www.aubreydaniels.com/discretionary-effort>

173 Thalmus Mahand and Cam Caldwell, “Quiet Quitting -Causes and Opportunities,” Business and Management Research, Vol 12, January 9, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.5430/bmr.v12n1p9>

174 Jim Harter, “Is Quiet Quitting Real?,” Gallup, May 17, 2023, <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/398306/quiet-quitting-real.aspx>



The general sentiment from research participants was that many managers or employers want to improve things in the workplace but don't have the resources to understand how their actions impact others. ICTC's Employer Survey found that, of the employers that did report providing training, among smaller companies (50-99 employees), only 15% provide EDI training for people managers, and only 12% provide EDI training for HR personnel. In large companies (500+), the amount of EDI training provided to people managers and HR personnel doubles, at 30% and 29%, respectively. HR teams may have good intentions and want to support equity in the workplace, but without the appropriate resources, they can turn people in EDI roles into figureheads. Interviewees who have worked in or with industry mentioned a tendency for internal EDI teams to "feel handcuffed" in their roles. Government has an important role to play in improving resource development and allocation, particularly to small businesses that may not have the same capacity or capital to provide support to their HR personnel or EDI teams. Measures such as grants and funding programs could empower businesses to invest more in EDI initiatives, while subsidized training and consulting services could offer practical tools and guidance and ensure businesses can effectively implement inclusive practices.

Other conversations highlighted the importance of support services having a background in or understanding of the community they are supporting. In these cases, it becomes important for organizations to use outside support. Outside support, such as engaging in meaningful consultations with community leaders, EDI experts, and Indigenous Elders, is a key solution to lifting the burden from Indigenous Peoples and persons from racialized communities and reducing mental health barriers to retention and advancement.

To lessen the psychological impacts that may lead to burnout, individuals consulted in this study called for EDI teams that are better equipped to communicate and handle cases with the communities they work with. Organizational strategies for enabling EDI and HR teams include encouraging immersive learning that fosters empathy and understanding of the lived experiences of others, as well as adopting top-down approaches that address the barriers that prevent managers from supporting the career development of equity-deserving individuals.¹⁷⁵ Another way to address gaps in EDI support and work to improve equity in the workplace is through building and maintaining partnerships with Indigenous organizations, Black and other racial and ethnic associations, immigrant groups and the LGBTQ2SIA+ community.¹⁷⁶

175

Catherine Skrzypinski, "Canada: HR Should Address Microaggressions in DE&I Training," SHRM, February 23, 2023, <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/global-hr/pages/canada-microaggressions-addressed-in-dei-training.aspx>

176

Ibid.



Strategies to Help Reduce Individual-Level Challenges to Career Advancement

CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Mental health and emotional labour	<p>Empower EDI personnel to do their jobs fully and avoid tokenization.</p> <p>Hire EDI personnel instead of expecting employees to champion decolonization or anti-racism as extra work.</p> <p>Engage in meaningful consultation with community-led organizations, EDI experts, and Indigenous elders to inform HR policies.</p>	Employers	<p>Incorporate principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in employee benefits plans, including equitable access to benefits for LGBTQ2S+ employees. Employers can leverage Benefits Canada’s webpage for a checklist of EDI best practices for benefits plans when developing inclusive benefits: https://www.benefitscanada.com/expertpanel_/kim-siddall/expert-panel-how-employers-can-align-their-benefits-plan-and-dei-strategy/</p> <p>Assess, address, and prevent workplace hazards, whether they be physical or psychological. This can be done by developing an organizational hazard prevention plan. Tips for developing such a plan can be found in the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada’s Hazard Prevention Program Guide: https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/canada/employment-social-development/services/health-safety/reports/hazard-prevention/prevention-guide.pdf</p> <p>Visit the Black Health Alliance’s Resource Hub to learn more about mental and physical health supports for Black communities in Canada: https://blackhealthalliance.ca/resources/knowledge-hub/</p> <p>Review and adopt the Mental Health Commission of Canada’s national standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace: https://www.csagroup.org/article/can-csa-z1003-13-bnq-9700-803-2013-r2022-psychological-health-and-safety-in-the-workplace/</p> <p>To help employers adopt the standard, the Mental Health Commission of Canada has developed a downloadable implementation guide and a free online toolkit: https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/national-standard/</p> <p>Train staff in mental health first aid so that employees experiencing a mental health crisis can be supported. Opening Minds and the Mental Health Commission of Canada have developed the following versions of Mental Health First Aid:</p> <p>Mental Health First Aid Standard: https://openingminds.org/training/mhfa/standard/</p> <p>Mental Health First Aid for First Nations: https://openingminds.org/training/mhfa/first-nations/</p> <p>Mental Health First Aid for Northern Peoples: https://openingminds.org/training/mhfa/northern-peoples/</p> <p>Mental Health First Aid for Inuit Peoples: https://openingminds.org/training/mhfa/inuit/</p>



CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Organizational trust and creating meaningful change	<p>Work with external agencies to provide mental health support or HR consulting.</p>	<p>Employers</p> <p>Professional Organizations</p> <p>Civil Society</p>	<p>Employers, professional organizations, and civil society can become familiar with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan 2023 – 2028: https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/ap-pa/ah/pdf/unda-action-plan-digital-eng.pdf</p> <p>Visit Indigenous Works' toolkit of best practices and community of support for EDI and HR professionals: "The Community for Indigenous Inclusion," https://www.iworks.org/</p> <p>Agencies with consulting services include:</p> <p>Evolv Consulting Services (certified by the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business): https://www.evolvconsultingservices.com/indigenous</p> <p>Black HR Professionals of Canada: https://blackhrpc.org/</p> <p>Harbour West: https://hwest.ca/indigenous-consulting</p> <p>Adirondack Information Management Inc.: https://adirondackhr.ca/</p> <p>Evenings + Weekends Consulting: https://www.eveningsandweekendsconsulting.com/workshops</p>
Quiet quitting	<p>Demonstrate a commitment to career development and recognition of employee value.</p> <p>Empower employee autonomy in their roles.</p> <p>Design or provide resources to teams that promote or allow work-life balance, such as flexible hours and remote working options that focus on productivity rather than hours worked.</p>	<p>Employers</p>	<p>Anti-racism and discrimination awareness can better enable managers to support diverse staff and empower autonomy and employees to bring their full selves to work. Resources employers can consult include:</p> <p>Watch the Centre for Race and Culture, "Challenging Discrimination through Community Conversations;" Seasons 1 & 2: https://cfrac.com/projects-initiatives/challenging-discrimination-through-community-conversations/</p> <p>Read "Building a Foundation for Change, Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2019-2022": https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/anti-racism-engagement/anti-racism-strategy.html</p> <p>To better understand ways to promote healthy work-life balance for employees, employers can review examples of organizations with established work-life balance initiatives: https://www.runn.io/blog/work-life-balance-initiatives</p>



CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Burnout	<p>Increase awareness among management around the factors that lead to burnout.</p> <p>Enable management, HR, and EDI teams through immersive education and partnerships with racialized organizations, associations, and community groups.</p> <p>Take top-down approaches to improve the manager's ability to support career development.</p>	Employers	<p>Visit the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety's webpage on work-life balance to learn more about the symptoms of burnout and how to mitigate burnout for employees. The webpage includes work-life balance initiatives, programs, and policies that employers can take to build a culture that supports a balanced lifestyle for all employees: https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/worklife_balance.html</p>
Lack of resources for HR personnel and EDI teams	Government incentives such as grants for small businesses or subsidized training opportunities.	Policymakers	<p>To build grants, programs and policies that are racial justice-oriented, policymakers can review the City of Seattle's Community-Driven Improvement Plan for Seattle's Equitable Development Fund: https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/OPCD/OngoingInitiatives/EquitableDevelopmentInitiative/CapstoneReport2019.pdf</p>

Group-Level Challenges for Inclusive Career Advancement

Coined in 1972 by social psychologist Irving L. Janis, the term “groupthink” refers to a “psychological phenomenon in which people strive for consensus within a group.”¹⁷⁷ Groupthink can result in individuals putting their personal opinions, beliefs, and even cultural identities aside in order to fit in with the rest of the group.¹⁷⁸ Groupthink is especially common in homogenous organizations which lack diversity of thought, diversity in race, and diversity in cultures. Importantly, groupthink can perpetuate unconscious bias and cultural incompetency and, more concerningly, can lead to discrimination and microaggressions toward individuals who are dissimilar to the rest of the group. Within organizations, this creates challenges for career advancement for racialized and newcomer workers. Building upon insights from research participants engaged in this study, the following subsections unpack how group-level challenges impact career advancement opportunities for equity-deserving groups.

177 Kendra Cherry, “How Groupthink Impacts Our Behavior,” Verywell Mind, November 12, 2022, <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-groupthink-2795213>

178 Ibid.



CHALLENGE

Unconscious Bias and Cultural Competency

Black and Indigenous Peoples engaged in this study stated they have found direct correlations between their personal promotional prospects and the representation of minority groups in decision-making roles. Speaking about her personal experiences as a Black woman, one interviewee shared: “I always look at the representation of the board, of the higher-ups, [and of] the senior staff. If it’s all white males, you know for a fact, oh, I’m probably never going to advance up to be there.” The reverse was observed as well, with Black and Indigenous participants feeling more positive toward their chances of being promoted when Black and Indigenous Peoples were represented at the top. As an Ontarian interviewee who identifies as Indigenous put it: “People will promote people like themselves—I think that’s human nature.”

Some biases may arise from systemic racism and stereotyping that has taken place for generations. For example, white managers may be less likely to promote Black or Indigenous Peoples due to an unconscious bias or stereotype related to these racial groups not belonging in leadership. A study by the Harvard Business Review performed a demographic audit of promotional evaluations at a US law firm and found that “only 9.5% of people of colour had mentions of leadership in their performance evaluations—more than 70% lower than white women.”¹⁷⁹ As explained in a recent study by ICTC on gender equity in leadership, “whether and how often leadership is mentioned in performance reviews can lead to higher competency ratings,”—thus impacting who is and is not offered a promotion.¹⁸⁰

In addition to reinforcing unconscious biases, research participants engaged in this study stated that homogeneous organizations that lack diverse representation also lack cultural competency. Indigenous research participants noted this to be especially true in the corporate world, where Indigenous Peoples are less represented.¹⁸¹ As noted by one focus group attendee, “Many [corporate] organizations don’t have other Indigenous people that I can relate to. We don’t want to be Westernized and cannot always feel represented in Western culture.” Other interviewees noted they did not feel comfortable upholding their cultural practices, such as smudging in the workplace.

Employers who lack an understanding of diverse Indigenous cultures are less likely to understand the value of Indigenous knowledge and skills and how these skills are transferable into leadership-level roles. One interviewee explained that, for example, Indigenous women have a “culture of caretaking” and acquire unique skills as they care for their community. Caretaking skills may include strong communication, time management, patience, active listening, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution.¹⁸² As noted in an article by Forbes Magazine, “Leadership is fundamental for caregiving, whether you’re leading children in learning or navigating the complexities of healthcare for an elder relative.”¹⁸³

179 Joan C. Williams, Denise Lewin Loyd, Mikayla Boginsky, and Frances Armas-Edwards, “How One Company Worked to Root Out Bias from Performance Reviews,” Harvard Business Review, 2021, <https://hbr.org/2021/04/how-one-company-worked-to-root-out-bias-from-performance-reviews>

180 Ibid.; Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), 2023, “Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech’s Untapped Potential.” Ottawa ON: Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, <https://www.digitalthinktankictc.com/ictc-admin/resources/admin/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.pdf>

181 Statistics Canada, “Table 98-10-0587-01 Employment Income Statistics by Occupation Minor Group, Indigenous Identity, Highest Level of Education, Work Activity during the Reference Year, Age and Gender: Canada, Provinces and Territories and Census Metropolitan Areas with Parts,” June 21, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl/en/tv.action?pid=9810058701>

182 Tracy Brower, “Can Caregiving Help Your Career? Yes! Leverage These 5 Skills To Get Ahead,” Forbes, November 21, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2021/11/21/can-caregiving-help-your-career-yes-leverage-these-5-skills-to-get-ahead/>

183 Ibid.



As noted by interviewees engaged in this study, the challenge is that many corporate employers do not recognize caretaking or other Indigenous skills, such as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), community values, resilience, or persistence, when assessing employees for promotions, ultimately disadvantaging Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous women in particular: *“My Inuit woman friends want to develop their careers, [but] there are so many roadblocks.”*

STRATEGIES

Build Cultural Competency Through Inclusion and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Training

For many years, the school of thought on diversity and inclusion was that organizational diversity was first needed to yield inclusion/workplace belonging.¹⁸⁴ A recent study critically examined this relationship and found that perhaps the opposite is true: inclusion yields diversity.¹⁸⁵ This research proposes that “inclusion is the starting place and determinant of success in creating a diverse workforce. If inclusion comes first and is followed by equitable treatment, then diversity (and diverse representation) naturally follows.”¹⁸⁶ With this in mind, it is important that organizations work to build inclusive cultures that value diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and cultures. Once an inclusive culture is established, diversity in the organization will likely grow, as will career advancement opportunities for equity-deserving groups.

How does an organization build an inclusive culture? Similarity bias may be decreased by building stronger relationships. Employers can formally encourage employees to get to know one another through biweekly meetings, team meetings, work events, or through introducing peer coaching. As one business development expert noted, “I think a lot of the times we are fixated on big policy and big things, but it might just be those small kinds of interactions [like taking a coworker out for coffee] that are meaningful.” Importantly, managers, teams, and leaders should adopt cultural humility. Cultural humility allows team members and colleagues to learn from one another as they form relationships.

While getting to know one another may reduce unconscious biases and help build cultural humility, it does not address all challenges associated with cultural competency. Formal training is needed to build cultural competency and make organizations truly inclusive. Based on the experiences of research participants engaged in this study, training related to inclusive management, cultural competency, unconscious bias, and anti-racism can have meaningful impacts on workplace inclusivity. Some interviewees engaged in this study noted that training, like cultural competency training, should be mandatory for all employees. Other research participants insisted training be a part of an organization’s EDI strategy.

184 Michelle Russen and Mary Dawson, “Which Should Come First? Examining Diversity, Equity and Inclusion,” *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 36., No. 1., January 1, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-09-2022-1184>

185 Ibid.

186 Ibid.



Unfortunately, about one-third of employers surveyed by ICTC are not providing any EDI training to their staff or departments.

Of the employers that are providing training:

Importantly, it was found that larger companies (500+ employees) were more likely than smaller companies (1-99 employees) to administer EDI training.

31%

administered anti-racism training

24%

administered cultural safety training

22%

had EDI training for HR personnel

23%

administered First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultural awareness training

23%

had EDI training for people managers

23%

had some type of EDI training included in onboarding materials for new hires

In addition to the training mentioned above, unconscious bias training, specifically for people in decision-making roles, is critical. To address unconscious bias and cultural incompetencies, EDI and Indigenous competency training efforts must be scaled up. For smaller organizations, where resource scarcity may be a challenge, organizations can seek free training, such as the following:

- ▶ The Implicit Association Test (IAT) is a free test developed by Harvard University. The test allows individuals to uncover and assess their own unconscious biases and how they may impact decision-making and social exclusion.¹⁸⁷
- ▶ Non-profit organizations can access unconscious bias training for their employees at no cost through the Cornerstone OnDemand Foundation.¹⁸⁸ This training is provided to ensure non-profit organizations with low margins can afford to offer training and build knowledge that supports equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace.¹⁸⁹
- ▶ Understanding Unconscious Bias and Microaggressions is a free webinar offered by LinkedIn. The webinar is led by experts in workplace inclusivity: Catherine Mattice and Sheila Eason.¹⁹⁰
- ▶ Corporations can engage with Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. for training and resources relevant to Indigenous awareness and Indigenous employment, such as best practices for Indigenous recruitment and retention. Among various training options, Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. includes a course titled Working with the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which offers legal and practical guidance for adhering to Bill C-15 (further expanded upon in the following section).¹⁹¹

187 "Project Implicit," Harvard University, accessed January 8, 2024, <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

188 "Unconscious Bias Training," nonprofitready.org, accessed January 8, 2024, <https://www.nonprofitready.org/unconscious-bias-training>

189 "About Us," nonprofitready.org, accessed January 8, 2024, <https://www.nonprofitready.org/about-us>

190 Catherine Mattice, "Understanding Bias and Microaggressions," LinkedIn, August 25, 2022, accessed January 8, 2024, <https://www.linkedin.com/events/6953560392820219904/comments/>

191 Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., "Training," 2024, <https://www.ictinc.ca/training>



Furthermore, government bodies may be able to drive organizational uptake of EDI training. This may be done by government requiring an organization's workforce to have anti-racism training, cultural competency training, and unconscious bias training prior to applying for government funding. Alternatively, governments can fund EDI training for organizations to help cut costs and build workplace inclusivity. A successful example of this is the Gateway to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Hub (GEDI-HUB), led by the Gateway Association in Calgary and funded by the Government of Canada's Sectoral Initiatives Program.¹⁹² The program offers participating workplaces free resources and training to workplaces in Alberta, enabling them to reduce bias and build cultural competency at no cost.

CHALLENGE

Discrimination and the Impact of Microaggressions in the Workplace

When biases are not addressed properly, they may turn into workplace discrimination, as defined previously in Section II of this report. Despite there being legal repercussions to workplace discrimination in Canada, many research participants engaged in this study said that discrimination is still a reality across the nation's workplaces. As noted by one interviewee from Ottawa, "discrimination, bias, and racism are ingrained in professional cultures in Canada." Similarly, research on race relations in Canada found that one in five Canadians experience discrimination regularly or from time to time, and about 40% of those said they experience racial discrimination at work.¹⁹³

A form of discrimination, microaggression or acts of exclusion can include subtle comments or actions that come from implicit bias, stereotypes and/or prejudices.¹⁹⁴ These everyday snubs and insults that people of racialized groups face can be intentional or unintentional but are active reflections of people's worldviews that can create and perpetuate marginalization.¹⁹⁵ Microaggressions differ from overt racism or other biases, as the people perpetuating them are often well-intentioned and unaware they said or did something offensive.¹⁹⁶ Microaggressions in the workplace can impact one's confidence, sense of belonging, and mental health, as well as reinforce barriers in one's life, including access to leadership roles in the workplace.¹⁹⁷ What's more, victims of microaggressions may see declines in productivity and problem-solving abilities.¹⁹⁸ The combined impact of this can be reduced job performance and fewer opportunities for promotion. As one DEI expert pointed out, a lack of Black representation in certain jobs or industries may be "because we don't get promoted and microaggressions are [still] around." Research participants shared that the transition to working from home during the pandemic reduced the number of microaggressions they experienced, but microaggressions are still one of the most pervasive forms of discrimination.

192 "Gateway to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Hub," Gateway Association of Alberta, accessed January 8, 2024, <https://gatewaytodiversity.ca/>

193 Keith Neuman, "Race Relations in Canada 2019 Survey," Environics Institute, December 10, 2019, <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/race-relations-in-canada-2019>

194 Derald Wing Sue, "Microaggressions: More Than Just Race," n.d., accessed January 8, 2024, https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/microaggressions_by_derald_wing_sue_ph.d....pdf

195 Ibid.

196 McKenna Prancing, "What Microaggressions Are and How to Prevent Them," Right as Rain by UW Medicine, September 3, 2019, <https://rightasrain.uwmedicine.org/life/relationships/microaggressions>

197 Mara Cadinu, Anne Maass, Alessandra Rosabianca, & Jeff Kiesner, "Why do women underperform under stereotype threat? Evidence for the role of negative thinking," *Psychological Science*, Vol. 16, pp. 572 - 578, July 2005, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16008792/>; Claude Steele, Steven Spencer, & Joshua Aronson, J. "Contending with group image: The psychology of stereotype and social identity threat," In M. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 2002, Vol. 23, pp. 379 - 440, New York: Academic Press.

198 Ibid.



STRATEGIES

Develop and Uphold Anti-Discrimination Policies

While the Canadian Human Rights Act prohibits workplace discrimination, research contributors and the ICTC Employer Survey suggest discrimination persists across Canadian workplaces, especially by way of microaggressions. Discrimination may persist because victims of discrimination do not feel comfortable speaking up when being treated unfairly for fear of being reprimanded. To overcome this, organizations should develop robust and strict anti-discrimination policies. A study by the Paris School of Economics and the Institute of Labour Economics found that having policies in place that “ban discrimination against at-risk groups likely contributes to protecting them once they are hired.”¹⁹⁹ That said, the study also reported that “anti-discrimination policies that rely on a punitive approach are not sufficient to combat discrimination.”²⁰⁰ As such, anti-discrimination policies must be paired with robust efforts that counter prejudice, biases, stereotypes, and microaggressions. As described in the previous section on unconscious bias and cultural competency, this can be achieved through building an inclusive culture and requiring employees to have unconscious bias training, anti-racism training, anti-homophobia training, cultural competency training, and more.

Once an inclusive culture is developed, victims and bystanders of discrimination may feel more comfortable reporting instances of discrimination. When an instance of discrimination is encountered, organizations must act swiftly to mend the situation. To ensure acts of discrimination are not repeated, individuals and organizations should reflect on the incident of discrimination and learn from it. This can be done via the following steps for addressing microaggressions, outlined by the Westcoast Women in Engineering, Science and Technology initiative:

- 1 ▶ Define microaggressions, especially the “invisible” or unconscious ones.
- 2 ▶ Recognize them in ourselves and in others.
- 3 ▶ Deconstruct the hidden meanings of microaggressions and why they may be occurring.
- 4 ▶ Acknowledge the effects of microaggressions and learn about coping strategies.
- 5 ▶ Act by implementing targeted education programs that mitigate further incidents.²⁰¹

199

Marie-Anne Valfort, “Do Anti-Discrimination Policies Work?,” *IZA World of Labor*, May 30, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.15185/izawol.450>

200

Ibid.

201

Westcoast Women in Engineering, Science & Technology (WWEST), “Microaggressions,” 2015, The University of British Columbia, <https://wwest.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2016/02/Microaggressions.pdf>



Summary of strategies that can be taken to overcome challenges experienced at the group level

CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Unconscious bias	<p>Build inclusive workplaces that encourage people from different walks of life to form relationships and “get to know one another.”</p> <p>Ensure that relationships are built with cultural humility in mind, enabling people to learn from one another.</p> <p>Make unconscious bias training mandatory, especially for people in power.</p>	Employers	<p>Take the free Implicit Association Test to assess individual biases: Harvard University, “Project Implicit,” https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html</p> <p>Non-profit organizations can access unconscious bias training for their employees at no cost through the Cornerstone OnDemand Foundation: NonprofitReady, “Unconscious Bias Training,” https://www.nonprofitready.org/unconscious-bias-training</p> <p>Take or provide individual or organization-wide EDI-training plans available through BIPOC Executive Search Inc., “Training,” https://bipocsearch.com/training/</p> <p>Leverage the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion’s toolkit on prejudice, bias, and discrimination: https://ccdi.ca/media/1589/toolkit-3-prejudice-bias-and-discrimination-how-to-stop-the-cycle.pdf</p>
Cultural competency	<p>Increase cultural competency through mandatory training.</p> <p>Engage with racialized and newcomer communities when choosing and administering training to ensure the training is up to date, relevant, and appropriate.</p> <p>Consult with racialized and newcomer communities to ensure their cultures are reflected in organizational policies.</p>	Employers	<p>Read the Assembly of First Nation’s Education Toolkit Learning Modules (AFN, “It’s Our Time Education Toolkit,” https://education.afn.ca/learning-modules/)</p> <p>Enrol in a local friendship centre training program such as OFIFC, “Indigenous Cultural Competency Training,” https://ofifc.org/training-learning/indigenous-cultural-competency-training-icct/) or one of CCSDH’s Indigenous cultural competency training options: https://www.nccih.ca/docs/other/CCSDH-Cultural-Competency-Training-EN.pdf</p> <p>Provide St. John Ambulance’s “Cultural Competency in the Workplace” course to employees: https://www.sja.ca/en/first-aid-training/online/cultural-competency-workplace</p> <p>Work with H.E.D.I. Consultants to provide organizational Hate, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion training: https://www.hediconsultants.ca/</p> <p>Seek corporate training from Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. related to Indigenous employment, recruitment, and retention, as well as training on Bill C-15 (the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples): https://www.ictinc.ca/training</p>



CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Discrimination and microaggressions	<p>Develop and uphold anti-discrimination policies that protect at-risk groups, including Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities, newcomers to Canada, persons with a disability, and members of the LGBTQ2SIA+ community.</p> <p>Train and encourage internal and management self-review of operational practices and policies and their potential impact on equity-deserving folks.</p> <p>Encourage an inclusive culture where victims and bystanders of discrimination and microaggressions feel comfortable reporting incidents.</p> <p>Reflect on incidents of discrimination and build targeting education that helps to mitigate repeat incidents.</p>	Employers	<p>Watch the webinar ‘Understanding Unconscious Bias and Microaggressions’ by Catherine Mattice and Sheila Eason on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/events/6953560392820219904/comments/</p> <p>Review the Westcoast Women in Engineering, Science and Technology initiative’s list of strategies to address microaggressions: https://wwest.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2016/02/Microaggressions.pdf</p> <p>Consult the Micropedia of Microaggressions to learn more about microaggressions and their impacts: https://www.themicropedia.org/</p> <p>Leverage the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusions toolkit on “Navigating the conflict zone and becoming an ally”: https://ccdi.ca/media/1590/toolkit-4-navigating-the-conflict-zone-and-becoming-an-ally.pdf</p> <p>Watch Sara Ahmed’s lecture on complaints to better understand structures and mechanisms of institutional power: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4j_BwPJoPTE</p>

Organizational Challenges to Inclusive Career Advancement

As described above, barriers and challenges to advancement are created and experienced differently and at different levels. While organizations have an important role to play in addressing individual-level challenges (like mental health, burnout, and isolation), as well as group-level challenges (like unconscious bias, cultural competency, and discrimination), organizations also create and perpetuate challenges to career advancement for equity-deserving communities. Key challenges that are both created by and must be addressed by organizations include the lack of representation of equity-deserving groups, inequitable opportunities for skills development, and subjective promotional processes. The following section unpacks these challenges and provides strategies employers and policymakers can employ to help build equitable access to career advancement opportunities.

CHALLENGE

Lack of Representation of People of Equity-deserving Groups in Leadership

ICTC’s employer survey asked Canadian businesses to estimate the proportion of C-suite roles in their organization that were held by people of equity-deserving groups (Figure 13). Results to this question highlighted the fact that equity-deserving groups are largely underrepresented in C-suite roles across surveyed organizations.



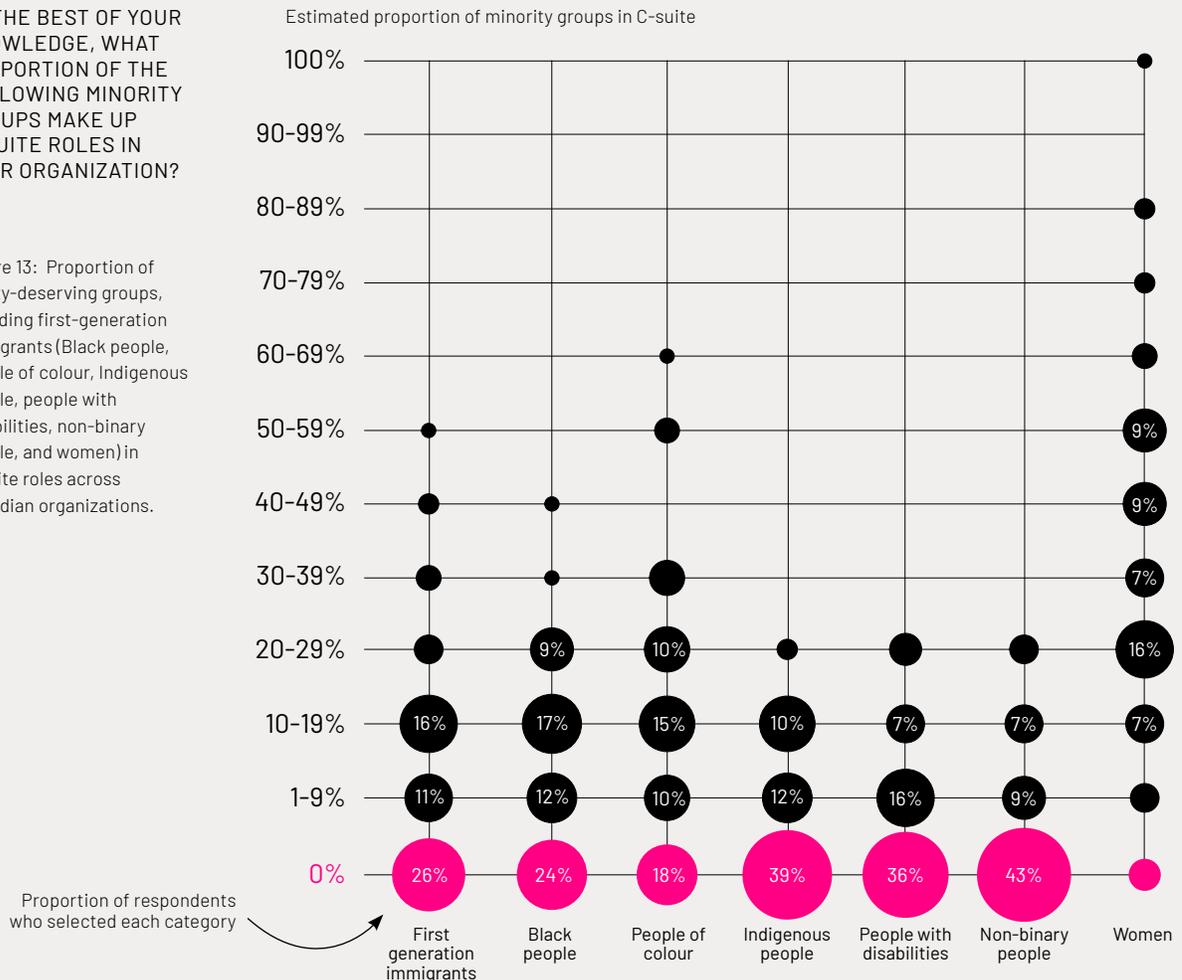
Many employers noted they had zero representation of equity-deserving groups in the C-suite:

- ▶ Over **40%** reported having zero **non-binary people** in C-suite
- ▶ Nearly **40%** reported having zero **Indigenous people** in C-suite
- ▶ Over **35%** reported having zero **people with disabilities** in C-suite
- ▶ Over **25%** reported having zero **first-generation immigrants** in C-suite
- ▶ Nearly **25%** reported having zero **Black people** in C-suite

Other employers had some equity-deserving groups represented in C-suite roles. Of the listed equity-deserving groups, employers noted that women comprised the highest proportion of C-suite roles. That said, it is unclear whether these women were primarily white or racialized. Other surveys on the demographic breakdown of women in leadership suggest that racialized women are underrepresented in C-suite roles.²⁰² People of colour were noted to have some representation in C-suite roles, with 15% of employers noting people of colour make up 10-19% of people in C-suite. Similarly, about 16% of employers noted that Black people make up 10-19% of people in C-suite.

TO THE BEST OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE, WHAT PROPORTION OF THE FOLLOWING MINORITY GROUPS MAKE UP C-SUITE ROLES IN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Figure 13: Proportion of equity-deserving groups, including first-generation immigrants (Black people, people of colour, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, non-binary people, and women) in C-suite roles across Canadian organizations.



Research participants engaged in this study noted that having low proportions of people of equity-deserving groups in leadership can create challenges related to workplace cultural safety, workplace inclusivity, and unconscious bias. All these challenges can impact innovation and lead to workplaces that are unfavourable to people of equity-deserving groups—especially when it comes to career advancement.²⁰³

These adverse effects can be particularly pronounced for women of colour who have been perceived as not belonging in decision-making roles for many years.²⁰⁴ According to an analysis of women’s representation in leadership in TSX-listed companies, Black women make up only 0.9% of corporate director roles, executive officer roles, senior management roles, and pipeline to senior management roles.²⁰⁵ Indigenous women make up only 0.3% of corporate director roles, executive officer roles, senior management roles, and pipeline to senior management roles.²⁰⁶ As summarized by a woman from Ottawa, *“As a Black woman, you have to be more aware of what’s realistic because a Black man would advance ahead of me, but a white woman would advance ahead of the Black man. And that is that. So there’s layers of how jobs are actually progressed...the Black woman is at the bottom of the hierarchy of things. It’s pretty ridiculous to think of that, but that’s why you see so many fewer Black women represented in those higher roles.”* In addition, according to the statistics above, Indigenous women are three times less represented than Black women.

STRATEGIES

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategies for Transparent Advancement

When gone unaddressed, workplaces with a homogenous leadership team will promote people similar to themselves, perpetuating a lack of diversity and diminishing pathways to advancement for people of equity-deserving groups. To avoid this, employers should focus on building inclusive workspaces that encourage the progressive advancement of equity-deserving team members. One way to tackle this issue is through formal Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) strategies and Indigenous inclusion strategies.

EDI strategies are roadmaps which guide an organization to achieving “institutional-wide equity, diversity, and inclusion priorities and goals.”²⁰⁷ **A strong EDI strategy should be built in a collaborative manner, engaging equity-deserving groups, staff members, and if possible, community members and EDI consultants.** More specifically, EDI strategies should be co-designed with the communities they are meant to support. For smaller organizations, this can be achieved through interviews with employees, community focus groups, or EDI consultancies. For larger organizations, anonymous employee surveys and Employee Resource Groups may also be leveraged.

203 “How equity, diversity and inclusion can drive growth and innovation in businesses of all sizes,” Toronto Metropolitan University, February 10, 2023, <https://www.torontomu.ca/diversity/news-events/2023/02/how-edi-can-drive-growth-and-innovation/>

204 Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), “Empowering Women in the Digital Economy,” Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, <https://www.digitalthinktankictc.com/ictc-admin/resources/admin/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.pdf>

205 “The Zero Report,” The Prosperity Project, February 2023, https://blog.canadianprosperityproject.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/TPP_ARC_2023_EN.pdf

206 Ibid.

207 “Towards Inclusive Excellence : McMaster University’s Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy Brochure,” Equity and Inclusion Office, McMaster University, retrieved January 5, 2024, <https://equity.mcmaster.ca/strategy/towards-inclusive-excellence/>



To build inclusive workspaces for Indigenous people, dedicated strategies for First Nations, Inuit, and Metis should be developed separately from more broad EDI strategies. **When beginning the development of an Indigenous inclusion strategy, it is first important to assess the organization's baseline.** As noted by an Ontario-based Indigenous interviewee: *"The employer really needs to internally assess whether they are welcoming and how appropriate their work environment is. And then build a strategy around some of the gaps and challenges that exist."* Another interviewee who identified as First Nations explained that assessing your baseline is especially important because each corporate culture is different, and different companies will have different pain points. However, it is important to remember that Indigenous inclusion is not just a "nice to have" in an organization; there are provincial and federal laws—Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA)²⁰⁸ and United Nations Declaration Act (UNDA),²⁰⁹ respectively—that set out commitments for inclusion and reconciliation required by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.²¹⁰ In addition, the TRC's Call to Action 92 calls upon the corporate sector to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework, whereby organizations must ensure skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.²¹¹

As noted by an interviewee from a British Columbia Indigenous corporation, if First Nations, Inuit, and Metis community members are excluded from inclusion strategy development, it is possible for the strategy to have negative unintended consequences: *"If Indigenous people aren't involved in the planning of an inclusion framework then even with well-meaning people, you still have a company or organization of people who have biases about their own biases. That stereotyping and prejudice will persist."* Further, as explained by an interviewee representing a First Nations organization, to build an Indigenous inclusion strategy, *"You have to have people who are experienced working on this. It should be Indigenous led. So you should understand the communities that you're working with and understand the historical perspective of working with them."*

Once gaps have been identified, the organization can develop EDI and Indigenous inclusion goals and implementation plans to help address challenge areas. Importantly, implementation plans should include a list of goals or intended outcomes and specific action items to achieve each goal. While these goals should be informed by the EDI and Indigenous inclusion co-design process, it is also recommended that employers leverage EDI resources and guidelines that have already been developed, such as the Government of Canada's guides for EDI.²¹² For First Nations, Inuit, and Metis inclusion, each industry sector has specific Calls to Action under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

208 "Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act," Government of British Columbia, December 27, 2023, <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/19044>

209 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Implementation Secretariat, "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan," Department of Justice Canada, 2023, <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/ap-pa/ah/pdf/unda-action-plan-digital-eng.pdf>

210 Ibid.

211 "Business and reconciliation," Government of Canada, August 2021, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524506030545/1557513309443>

212 Canada Research Chairs, "Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan," June 28, 2022, https://www.chairs-chaires.gc.ca/program-programme/equity-equite/action_plan-plan_action-eng.aspx



For organizations lacking in diversity at the leadership level, targeted approaches to recruit, retain, and advance racialized and newcomer workers should be included within an EDI strategy. Targets may differ depending on the current state of the organization, as well as regional factors. For example, if an organization has diversity at the entry level but not at the mid to senior level, efforts should focus primarily on building equitable-promoting processes and career advancement opportunities (e.g., mentorship for equity-deserving groups). If the organization lacks diversity altogether, efforts should focus more on inclusive attraction and hiring processes. Moreover, organizations can work to align their diversity targets with the region's population (e.g., if the region has a high representation of Black Peoples, so too should the organization; if the region has a high representation of Indigenous Peoples, so too should the organization).

Best practices for inclusive hiring and promotional structures can help organizations achieve diversity targets. As noted in Section II, HR should aim to broaden its networks by notifying community-led organizations of job postings. Additionally, organizations have diverse hiring panels, employ anonymized recruitment practices, have a standardized interview process (to ensure consistency and fairness), and should train hiring committees on unconscious bias.²¹³ To ensure racialized peoples are promoted within organizations, thus increasing diversity at the leadership level, organizations should build clear and transparent promotional structures (expanded upon later in this section), ensure decision-making panels are diverse in nature, and cultivate an inclusive leadership team.²¹⁴



213

Maryna Ivus and Maya Watson, "Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem: Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting Entry- and Mid- Level Talent," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), May 2022, <https://www.digitalthinktankictc.com/reports/gender-equity-in-canadas-tech-ecosystem>

214

Ibid.



How are Canadian Employers Approaching EDI Targets? Insights from ICTC's Employer Survey

The ICTC employer survey included several questions that aimed to understand how Canadian employers were approaching EDI and what gaps might exist in their policies. In an open-ended question, respondents to the employer survey were asked to name any existing diversity and inclusion targets set by their organization. Overall, only 28% said they had targets of some kind, but this was more common in larger than in smaller companies (31% of companies over 500 vs. 20% of companies 50-99). Of companies with targets, however, about a third simply said that their target was to create an "equal opportunity" for all and that they primarily based evaluation on qualifications. One research contributor with EDI expertise commented that a focus on "equal opportunity" could ignore system barriers to employment. A further 23% of employer survey respondents said they had targets but didn't specify what they were. Accordingly, a very small number of participants reported having tangible targets related to diversity and inclusion. Of the entire sample, about 6% (n = 28) discussed some kind of goal related to different cultures or racialized persons, 2% (10) talked about setting gender diversity targets, and one person discussed setting targets related to age.

In some cases, employer responses articulated unambiguous targets.

Examples of such targets include:

- “ 25% of employees are visible minorities. ”
- “ 50% men/50% women. ”
- “ Having a correlation between the diversity of our workforce and the general population. ”

A small number of these alluded to targets attached to seniority:

- “ Yes, we are now requiring certain senior roles to be filled by a visible minority. ”

Conversely, many expressed a desire to have a more diverse workforce but found targets difficult to implement due to a tight labour market or uncertainty about implementation:

- “ We consider diversity to be an important element. This is one of our objectives, but we don't have a precise figure [target]. ”

Other employers expressed confusion at why targets might be helpful or frustration that targets might interfere with their ability to hire the best person for the job. In qualitative interviews with experts in equitable employment, several noted that employers might not notice that their outreach strategies, defacto networks, or job post contents were creating a candidate pool that lacks diversity. Organizations with diversity targets, if approaching the task genuinely, are likely still hiring the most qualified person for the role but putting in time and effort to ensure that their organization's reputation, networks, and application processes are inclusive and attractive.



Monitoring and evaluation should be a key part of an organization’s EDI strategy. Based on findings from ICTC’s employer survey, Canadian organizations employ various methods for evaluating and monitoring EDI targets and goals. For many of these employees (62%), the responsibility of monitoring and evaluating EDI strategies fell on their human resources department. Next, 38% of employers conducted internal management reviews, 35% conducted a year-end employment audit, and 21% performed an external audit. Meanwhile, about one in 10 (9%) of employer respondents with EDI strategies admitted they did not have any formal policies or processes in place to stay accountable for their goals.

Importantly, EDI strategies should be designed for progress and should be backed by resources. Without the needed resources, personnel, and planning, EDI strategies are far less likely to succeed:

“Are we designing for comfort or for progress—designing for comfort is designing for the most palatable, and designing for progress, you are centring for Black, Indigenous, and racialized folks.”

– Ontario interviewee identifying as Indigenous

“Most employers are not putting a significant amount of resources aside to support this issue with their employees or with their organization to match what they want to accomplish. You can't have somebody doing this on the side of their desk. You have to have designated people who can work on this... A lot of things fail because of that lack of resource support.”

– British Columbian interviewee identifying as Black

CHALLENGE

Inequitable Opportunities for Skill Development, Impact on Retention

When discussing their opportunities for advancement, participants generally referred to needing to develop more skills, obtaining higher levels of education, or gaining more work experience to advance. For some, this is a recognition that they are not yet ready to advance and are still focused on “improving knowledge” and “learning job skills” before eventually seeking a promotion. However, in many cases, someone may have a desire to progress but face challenges accessing skill development or receiving on-the-job training and experience to develop and show their skills. During a focus group with racialized and immigrant workers and job seekers in Toronto, one individual shared that “when you’re in a job, you only have the skills to stay in that role. Employers need to give employees opportunities to learn and grow within their organization.” A municipal EDI consultant in Ontario commented,

“Companies used to hire entry-level and then work those people up into more senior positions. We don’t do that anymore. We just pluck people with credentials and experience, and we put them in at higher levels so that it really makes it difficult for this junior person to rise. We don’t have the model anymore where the junior person rises through the ranks because they’ve been trained and invested in in-house.”



For either situation, when there are limited opportunities to develop skills, build experience, or work toward a promotional pathway, many individuals look to new companies or industries to advance. Research participants shared their perspectives on this matter:

“ I am working on a certification right now which would help me to move up into more of a senior role [...] For me, I need to move over to move up to a new level. There is no level to move up to is what I’m saying. If I build my skills, I could move kind of laterally to a higher paying role with different skills. In this field, titles matter a bit, too, so I can’t call myself an engineer until I do my P.Eng. Once I do that, I can be a Software Engineer, then a Dev Ops Engineer, and all of these come with a higher salary. ”

- BC interviewee identifying as a Person of colour

“ I know if I want to move, there are some other roles... Right now, where I am, it is a really good place to work. The staff turnover is almost nothing. And so there isn’t upward opportunity for me in this place as much. ”

- Saskatchewan interviewee identifying as Nigerian-Canadian

While some research shows that job switching can improve people’s advancement opportunities or the trajectory of their career progression, understanding the variety of influencing factors for the change is of most concern regarding improving workplace equity. Racialized individuals may encounter limited upward mobility or face systemic barriers within their current workplace, prompting a shift to an environment where opportunities for professional growth are more equitable. Additionally, changing jobs can provide access to networks and mentors that may be crucial for career advancement, especially if their current workplace lacks EDI initiatives. The decision to switch jobs or industries may arise from the desire to explore industries or companies that prioritize diversity, offering a better chance for recognition and advancement based on merit rather than facing potential biases. However, switching jobs may not always be a realistic solution for equity-deserving groups, as one’s socioeconomic position can have an impact on the ability to advance. For example, one interviewee in Ottawa finds their opportunities to advance limited and often require moving departments, which would require moving cities or provinces:

“ It doesn’t seem like I’m going to be able to move up anytime soon as I would have to locate to another city entirely. So that’s another thing that kind of stops me a bit because I don’t really have a car, and I don’t have a lot of...I haven’t really moved anywhere else. So just being in Ottawa is really...I know the area, and I feel uncomfortable moving anywhere else, and I don’t really have any resources around me that I know of. ”

STRATEGIES

Professional Development, Training, and Upskilling to Support Career Advancement

In addition to improving EDI policies and initiatives, in order to improve retention of racialized and newcomer talent, employers must invest in the development of talent, including addressing gaps in skill development and providing exposure to the work experience needed for racialized career progression.



In ICTC’s employer survey, across all respondents, 80% of surveyed organizations indicated a willingness to upskill existing staff to address current staffing challenges. Of the organizations that indicated they would invest in upskilling existing staff, only about one-third of respondents (33%) were “very likely” to invest in upskilling existing, with the majority being “somewhat likely” (47%). Only 17% of respondents were “somewhat unlikely” (13%) or “not at all likely” (4%) to upskill existing staff.

Workplaces do assume a certain degree of responsibility for the learning and development of their employees. Research from the EU finds that for many workers, learning is predominantly work-based, along with periods of institutionalized learning.²¹⁶ While employer and employee willingness to invest in upskilling is positive, a paradigm shift is needed regarding professional development training and upskilling. ICTC’s employer survey saw 69% of organizations say “yes” to currently offering internal reskilling or upskilling training. Of the types of upskilling training offered, 13% were unspecified courses or “all types” of training, as well as general in-house training/courses (11%), online training/courses (11%), technical training (10%) and education upgrades/allowances for schooling (10%). While these results indicate a decent commitment to employee upskilling, in the context of career development and supporting advancement through training, specific offerings such as leadership/management training (5%), professional development (4%), and mentoring (3%) scored lower.

To step into a management role in many industries, people are required to assume high levels of financial, ethical, and social responsibility. Proper training and support are required to facilitate successful progression to higher levels. As an individual in Regina who identifies as a Person of colour discussed, “[My employer] is always looking for more management because people are scared... I was technically a team leader unofficially, so I think I could do the job if necessary, provided I have the proper training.” By providing adequate training and preparation for promotions, employers can build the confidence of their employees and improve the chances of retention as well as performance in the role and opportunities for further advancement.

HOW LIKELY IS YOUR ORGANIZATION TO UPSKILL EXISTING STAFF TO ADDRESS THE STAFFING CHALLENGES?

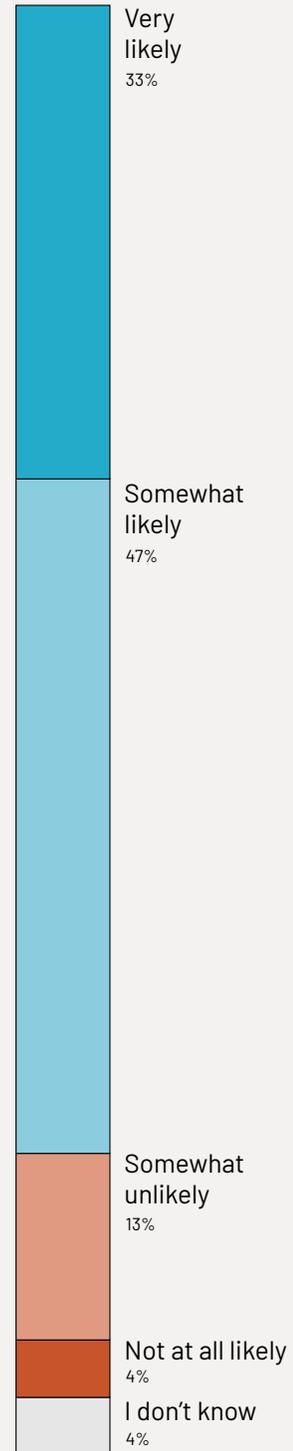


Figure 14: Employer willingness to invest in upskilling, ICTC Employer Survey.

216

Jenny Bimrose and Alan Brown, “Mid-Career Progression and Development: The Role for Career Guidance and Counseling,” in *Handbook of Career Development: International Perspectives*, ed. Gideon Arulmani et al., International and Cultural Psychology (New York, NY: Springer, 2014), 203–22, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-9460-7_11.



Retention issues for an organization can, in turn, impact its ability to attract new, diverse talent. Research participants called for a value shift toward developing individual capabilities in a broader sense. This might look like more of an attitudinal or philosophical shift toward professional development training among employers, but ultimately commits to fostering equitable opportunities and recognizes the importance of investing in the skills and talents of each individual.

SOLUTION

The Role of Mentorship in Advancement

Results from a Canadian Workplace Culture Index survey in May 2021 found that more than one-third of Canadians don't feel that senior managers make an effort to connect with employees.²¹⁷ In the employer survey, when asked what kind of training their organization provided, only 3% said mentorship/coaching for reskilling and upskilling, and 2% provided mentorship or coaching for other training purposes. Mentorship is a key component for supporting the career advancement of racialized workers. Interviewees want to see a personal buy-in from their supervisors in support of their professional development and career growth. One Indigenous woman shared her opinion that "if employers want to do better, they could practice supervisory management. How connected supervisors are with their staff, that has always been the big one." She added, "It's not about performance planning and review, and more about spending time talking to an employee about how things are going in their lives." An interviewee from Victoria felt that "if I knew they had goals for me if they had hopes for me, I think that would be good...having someone see that ambition." Providing mentorship training and empowering leadership to engage in and provide mentorship opportunities is an organizational strategy that can benefit racialized workers of all ages and levels of employment. As summed up by a research participant in Regina, "One beautiful thing about mentors is that they get you close to your goal as early as possible."

Mentoring initiatives can serve to better support the advancement of racialized workers into mid- and senior-level roles, in turn improving workplace diversity at the middle and upper management levels. It is essential for organizations to encourage various forms of mentoring while removing obstacles that may hinder employees' participation. Research out of the University of British Columbia found that engaging in diverse forms of mentorship, such as peer-based, seniority-based, and non-work-related, offers multiple avenues for comprehensive personal development at all career levels.²¹⁸ Within organizations, establishing clear expectations is crucial for ensuring the success of mentoring relationships, and using facilitative responses as relationship-building tools helps create an environment where individuals feel comfortable sharing personal information.²¹⁹

217 Canadian Workplace Culture Index, "BIPOC Canadians Are Three Times More Likely to State They Have Been Let Go from Their Company Because of COVID-19, Survey Finds," October 18, 2021, <https://www.cultureindex.io/2021/10/18/2021-survey-results-and-insights-release/>

218 Westcoast Women in Engineering, Science & Technology, "Mentoring Works," The University of British Columbia, May 7, 2014, <https://wwest.mech.ubc.ca/diversity/mentoring-works/>.

219 Ibid.



SOLUTION

Increasing Opportunities for Professional Development

An employer shared their organization's approach to professional development: "We are creating learning paths to bring people into the right direction of the company. We are working on making career paths clearer and building opportunities for everyone."

As highlighted by another interviewee, opportunities that will help with progressing people's careers include exposure and being able to attend events where one can learn. Other research participants called for organizations and training institutions to make skills development and upskilling "a more inclusive experience" and asserted the importance of learning and development:

“ If you hire certain individuals, you should also have a solid platform for learning and development. In organizations that have a budget for employees to do upskilling and reskilling programs, if they see an ROI, they can design something that would build this into their organization. At the same time, if they use the knowledge, then give opportunities to advance in their career and retain these candidates. ”

- Ontarian interviewee identifying as a newcomer to Canada

“ How can we creatively design our rollout of skills development program so that it meets peoples' immediate needs so that they have more time, attention and energy to actually participate and absorb the material? ”

- Ontarian interviewee identifying as a person of colour

Providing professional development hours during work hours is one way employers can support upskilling of a diverse staff. Another important shift suggested by an Indigenous woman in Ottawa looks like better "acknowledgements of lived experiences and past experiences in terms of people's goals." But no matter the approach, offering wraparound supports to go along with skills development (e.g., paying for transportation, offering childcare, financial assistance, and basic income being the ultimate wraparound support) is an important step to progressing the career advancement of equity-deserving groups.



Language Requirements:

A Catch-22 for Newcomers to Canada

Newcomers to Canada want—and often need—to improve their English language skills so that they can advance in their careers, but the requirement for fluent or conversational English can be a barrier to advancement for newcomers to Canada. As an interviewee in Ottawa shared, “I have a diploma, I want a position...at least a supervisor or something. I know English is very important to have a position, so this is a challenge for myself. So, I know that if I want the position, I have to push myself. So from now on to one year, I should be speaking English more fluently.”

Some newcomers to Canada informed ICTC researchers that a lack of Canadian residency impacted their ability to access services important to their career progression. For example, for a newcomer in Halifax, the English language course in their city was restricted to permanent residents. The interviewee found themselves stuck, as English language proficiency is required to attain a permanent residency in Canada, but with permanent residency needed to access the English language training, their path to both PR and higher-level roles was impacted.

CHALLENGE

Subjectivity and Lack of Transparency in Promotional Decisions

Progression can be a challenge in workplaces without high levels of cultural, racial, or ethnic diversity. On the one hand, being “dissimilar” to others in an organization has been shown to lead to the attrition of people from equity-deserving groups.²²⁰ As discussed above, it is important for workplaces to create a sense of belonging for all employees, as equity-deserving groups have a tendency to leave jobs where their culture or race is dissimilar to that of the organization and they are not adequately supported through representation or cultural safety. On the other hand, equity-deserving groups that are committed to staying at their organizations are often overlooked for promotions or opportunities to advance. In one interviewee’s experience, they were aware of a Black woman who was not promoted to EDI manager despite a 25-year tenure and two years of leading EDI at her organization. In sharing this story, the interviewee continued to say that this individual was “under the impression they would get that opportunity” and was “devastated” when it went to someone else. Respondents also shared how, in situations like this, colleagues who see themselves in similar positions experience frustration and discouragement, feeling that “if my colleague can’t get that promotion, what chance do I have?”

220

Susan E. Jackson et al., “Some Differences Make a Difference: Individual Dissimilarity and Group Heterogeneity as Correlates of Recruitment, Promotions, and Turnover,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 76, no. 5 (1991): 675–89, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.76.5.675>



At a very basic level, an employee's chance of competing for a promotion is dependent on that individual being aware that an opening exists. A challenge that was mentioned by some focus group attendees was that they often were not made aware of opportunities for promotion. Meanwhile, other research participants described times when they heard of a colleague being "randomly promoted" and did not understand what the evaluation process was for that individual to be promoted. Without a clear understanding of pathways to advancement, it can be challenging for employees to understand what skills or competencies they need to develop to grow. This can cause individuals to stall in their careers or leave the company to seek advancement opportunities elsewhere (this is expanded upon in the earlier section).

In addition to a lack of awareness surrounding promotional opportunities, several research participants engaged in this study also described subjectivity in promotional decisions to be a challenge they face in career advancement. This may be because subjective promotional processes lead to promotions being awarded to individuals who have the strongest relationship with their manager, as opposed to the promotion being awarded based on performance.²²¹ Promotions based on relationships can disadvantage people who do not have the time to attend workplace events or social hours, such as people who have additional caregiving duties, single parents, or people who have second jobs. Moreover, promotions based on relationships can be challenging for people who don't feel comfortable building that relationship due to a lack of cultural safety.

As discussed in Part II, research participants also noted encountering companies hiring mid- to senior-level positions with stringent requirements, such as having at least 10–15 years of relevant experience. Racialized interviewees seeking advancement opportunities mentioned self-selecting out of opportunities or found the company would not "take a risk" on them. Even when they have the experience, several Indigenous research participants shared feeling intimidated to apply for larger companies or for more senior-level roles because of self-limiting beliefs around skills and abilities, and the concern of transferability from on-reserve work experience to work off-reserve.

STRATEGIES

Re-Evaluating Evaluation Criteria for Senior Roles and Promotions

To address the above challenges, employers are encouraged to build promotional processes that are structured, data-driven, and unbiased. For employers who do not have formal processes for promotions, this may include developing evaluation criteria for each role, as well as a job-family matrix that showcases skills and competencies needed to advance at the organization.²²² Importantly, promotional criteria should be flexible, not rigid. This may mean creating pathways for people without a post-secondary education but who have the necessary skills and experience to be qualified for a job. Once created, promotional criteria should be communicated clearly across the organization so that employees understand when it is appropriate to ask for a promotion, as well as what skills they can improve upon to be qualified for a promotion.

221 Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, <https://www.digitalthinktankictc.com/ictc-admin/resources/admin/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.pdf>

222 Ibid.



Once criteria are in place, organizations should work to build standardized evaluations and performance review processes that inform promotional decisions. These may include peer reviews, manager reviews, as well as key metrics of success. Importantly, feedback should be given to all employees so that everyone sees there is transparency regarding areas for improvement. This includes providing honest feedback when somebody does not receive a promotion or a job. As one research participant from Edmonton said, “Be honest with me. At least if you’re honest, I’ll know what to work on.” Other research participants noted that having formal feedback structures and clarity around promotional decisions is an important way for employers to avoid unconscious bias and discrimination—providing a justification can help to ensure decisions are made based on merit and not based on relationships or favouritism. Moreover, communication and honest feedback via standardized review processes are critical for skills development, allowing people from equity-deserving communities to work on levelling up their skills in the areas where it is most needed.

Summary of strategies to help overcome organizational and institutional-level challenges to career advancement for racialized and newcomer workers.

CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
<p>Lack of representation of equity-deserving groups in leadership</p>	<p>Develop a strong EDI strategy that is built in a collaborative manner.</p> <p>Engage with EDI consultants and racialized community-serving organizations to ensure the EDI strategy will not have negative unintended outcomes.</p> <p>Set targets to increase the number of racialized workers at the leadership level.</p> <p>Back the EDI strategy with resources.</p> <p>Monitor, evaluate, and improve the EDI strategy in an ongoing manner.</p>	Employers	<p>To ensure EDI strategies are developed collaboratively, employers can build employee resource groups (ERGs) to gather feedback and assess employee needs as they relate to EDI. To get started with an ERG, employers can review the following resources:</p> <p>Benevity’s blog on ERGs: https://benevity.com/resources/employee-resource-groups-create-belonging</p> <p>Gartner’s blog on ERGs: https://jobs.gartner.com/life-at-gartner/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/gartner-s-employee-resource-groups/</p> <p>Salesforce’s study on the structure and operations of ERGs: https://www.salesforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/spc-report-structure-operations-of-ergs-111021-v1.pdf</p> <p>Consult the CIO Executive Council’s webpage titled “Diversity and inclusion: 7 best practices for changing your culture” to gather tips for strong EDI strategy development: https://www.cio.com/article/228581/diversity-and-inclusion-8-best-practices-for-changing-your-culture.html</p> <p>Choose an EDI consultancy that best suits the needs of your organization. Some examples of EDI consultants include the following:</p> <p>Empowered EDI (national firm): https://www.livempowered.ca/</p> <p>Remedi (national firm): https://www.remеди.com/</p> <p>Crayon Strategies (Nova Scotian firm): https://www.crayonstrategies.ca/</p>
	<p>221 Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), “Empowering Women in the Digital Economy,” Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023. https://www.digitalthinktankictc.com/ictc-admin/resources/admin/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.pdf</p> <p>222 <i>ibid.</i></p>		



CHALLENGE AREA	OPPORTUNITY	RELEVANT PARTIES	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Inequitable opportunities for skill development	<p>Invest in the development of talent, including addressing gaps in skill development and providing exposure to the work experience needed for racialized career progression.</p> <p>Providing and enabling professional development during work hours.</p> <p>Improving access or availability of wraparound supports such as financial, transportation, and childcare assistance.</p>	<p>Employers</p> <p>Policymakers</p>	<p>Visit The Discover Ability Network, a portal that connects employers with resources that foster inclusive and accessible work environments: https://discoverability.network/</p> <p>Read the Future Skills Centre and The Conference Board of Canada’s impact paper on social-emotional skill evaluation biases for Black Canadians and what leaders can do to overcome the challenges: https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/levelling-the-playing-field_2023.pdf</p> <p>Download the SRDC’s brief on wraparound supports, which includes examples and outlines a series of considerations and approaches that may support the design and implementation of wraparound supports in employment and skills training: https://srdc.org/project/wraparound-supports-in-employment-and-skills-training-a-feminist-perspective/</p>
Subjectivity and lack of transparency in promotional decisions	<p>Build promotional structures that are structured, data-driven, and free from bias.</p> <p>Ensure promotional criteria are inclusive and flexible, allowing people with diverse experiences to qualify for a promotion.</p> <p>Build formal and standardized evaluations and performance review processes. These processes should include honest feedback to all employees to ensure racialized workers engage in professional development in the area that is needed most by their employer.</p>	<p>Employers</p>	<p>Download and read the report “How to increase transparency of progression, pay and reward” by The Behavioural Insights Team: https://www.bi.team/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/BIT_How_to_improve_gender_equality_guide-ITPPR.pdf</p> <p>Read Section H: Retention and Promotion in the Canada Research Chair’s “Best Practices Guide for Recruitment, Hiring and Retention”: https://www.chairs-chaire.gc.ca/program-programme/equity-equite/best_practices-pratiques_examplaires-eng.aspx</p> <p>Download MacLean & Company’s guide on creating inclusive promotional policies and processes: https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/promotion-policy</p> <p>Read Equity Methods LLC’s article on promotional equity and pay equity as it relates to an organization’s EDI strategy: https://www.equitymethods.com/articles/promotion-equity-linking-pay-equity-to-diversity-inclusion/</p>



Organizational Blind Spots: Discrepancies Between Workplace Perceptions and Realities in Addressing Barriers to Career Advancement

In terms of organizational efforts to address these barriers, interviewees noted a persisting gap between what employers and workplaces *feel* is going on and the *actual* experiences of employees. Interviewees noted that while senior management might be “trying to do the right thing,” they may not be fully aware of the manifestation of individual, group, or organizational barriers. In a 2019 report on Arab youth workforce integration, the Canadian Arab Institute noted that “institutionalized racial discrimination is deeply rooted in the labour market,” and it remains persistent despite the efforts of governments and employers to address such issues.²²³ As stated by one EDI specialist, “The people who are trying to do something are completely unaware of what their role is in perpetuating all of these things.” Notably, work in the anti-racism space by this interviewee uncovered a significant mismatch between the belief that non-white people face barriers and that it was not a problem within their teams or workplaces. A perspective shared by another interviewee is that even if there are policies in place, “the system doesn’t always really want to support [equity].” With this in mind, individuals, employers, policymakers, and civil society must work together to build cultures and environments of inclusivity where people from all walks of life can thrive. For employers, this means supporting workplace policies with meaningful commitments, humility, and an open mind.

223

Aisha Shibli, “Discrimination in the Workplace: A Stumbling Block Toward Professional Development for Arab Youth in the Canadian Labour Market,” Canadian Arab Institute, September 2019, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e09162ecf041b5662cf6c4/t/5e7cda6e678813093fc50022/1585240686622/Professional+Development.pdf>, 2.





Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted each person in Canada, yet its burden was borne disproportionately by some groups, communities, genders and identities. The labour, health, and cost of living-related legacy of the pandemic continues to have lasting consequences for employers and job seekers; and, while each individual's experience is unique, in aggregate, unemployment rates remain disproportionately high for racialized and newcomer communities. Rather than focusing on employment alone, however, this report has primarily examined career advancement and mobility. Equitable advancement and mobility are important insurance against future labour market shocks; they encourage employers to use team members' skills to their fullest potential while also supporting individual agency in directing one's own career. Diverse lived experience among career transitioners from equity-deserving communities and in leadership roles has spillover benefits for organizations related to innovation, market access, and labour supply challenges, and it opens the door to improved representation in future. As such, this report has described experiences of advancement and mobility during and following COVID. In addition, it has identified barriers/challenges and strategies for ameliorating these barriers at different levels of intervention.



Labour force planning across the Canadian economy means creating opportunities for maximum skill transferability—workers and lifelong learners should have the power to shape their careers as they choose. Safety nets, educational innovation, and inclusive workplaces are all essential components of this. Future research into this topic could include a fulsome analysis of social safety nets like the CERB, including who they missed and why. Furthermore, it is incumbent on organizations like ICTC that produce and disseminate labour market information to do more research into user experience, accessibility, and knowledge translation to ensure that LMI is helpful to all job seekers.

Much of this study, however, has relayed findings relevant to employers: workplaces are best placed to provide opportunities for career development. Accordingly, this paper closes with a reflection. In ICTC’s consultations with equity-deserving communities, research participants were asked to share their opinions and recommendations on what makes a good employer. The following qualities were a clear consensus across many interviews and focus groups. A good employer is:

- ▶ Welcoming and respectful to all employees;
- ▶ Doing their own learning and/or receiving coaching to build EDI skills;
- ▶ Iteratively improving organizational cultural competency;
- ▶ Demonstrating commitment to employee growth through personal buy-in and mentorship;
- ▶ Communicating clearly, consistently, and transparently; and
- ▶ Pursuing equity in decision-making.

In short, many of the strategies discussed throughout this report are aimed at systemic and sustainable change but must begin with individual mentors and employers. However actionable, it is also important to recall that supporting equitable career growth and improving advancement opportunities for equity-deserving workers is a living process rather than a checklist: as one interviewee commented, it “has to be an ongoing process that is rooted in humility.”



Appendix

There are two halves to the Equitable Rebound project. One stream of the research focused on Canadian employers: it examines the demand for talent across Canada, with a focus on roles that foster improved job mobility and career advancement (e.g., involving transferable skills or a platform for promotion). It also aimed to understand and improve strategies for ensuring workplace equity in advancement and mobility. To characterize demand and employer-side strategies for enhancing equity, ICTC has conducted a national employer survey, developed and implemented a national job scraping and aggregation strategy, and conducted key informant interviews with employers, human resources professionals, and subject matter experts.

The second stream of the research focused on learning from the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and racialized workers and job seekers following the COVID-19 pandemic. Through extensive primary research, this stream sought to understand the barriers to advancement and transition that people have encountered, what policies and programs have been most helpful in helping them overcome these barriers, and enabling infrastructure that can further support Black, Indigenous, and racialized leadership in this space. Eventually, this project will also seek to produce labour market data and resources that job seekers can use to improve access to career mobility and advancement: part of the research process investigates user experiences with ICTC's career planning tools and how they can be improved.

Advisory Committee and Participatory Approach:

ICTC convened a project advisory committee of 11 subject matter experts from community-led organizations, EDI consulting, and other related fields. The project advisory committee guided study methodology and commented upon research in progress. ICTC also took a participatory approach to in-person engagements co-led with community-serving organizations, incorporating community research goals and report-backs into each event.

Qualitative Engagements:

In 2022 and 2023, the ICTC research team conducted a wide variety of community engagement activities, including hosting in-person workshops in partnership with community-serving organizations in Edmonton (one for Indigenous Peoples and one for Black, people of colour, and newcomer participants) and Toronto (for any racialized and newcomer attendees), Vancouver, Halifax, and St. John's (for all groups). In addition, the research team visited several conferences and events, including the Manitoba Association for Career Development conference in 2022 (about 150 attendees), the Our Children's Medicine job fair in Toronto (~30 attendees), and the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition job fair (~100 attendees). Finally, the research team set up interview booths in public spaces across Canada and conducted in-person conversations with people who self-selected into the study.



REGION	FNMI	PEOPLE OF COLOUR, BLACK & NEWCOMER COMMUNITIES	OTHER (E.G. SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS)
Alberta	11	28	-
Atlantic Canada	3	30	1
British Columbia	3	8	-
Manitoba	4	9	10
Ontario	14	104	4
Quebec	-	10	-
Saskatchewan	30	13	1
The Territories	7	2	-
Total	72	204	16

In total, ICTC engaged directly and indirectly with over 500 community members during this study. Of these, 292 community members and subject matter experts participated directly via detailed interviews and/or regional focus groups; and approximately 280 engaged with ICTC via informal discussions at events (including via engagement with ICTC booths), and participation/engagement in ICTC-held workshops.

Employer Survey:

The ICTC Equitable Rebound Employer Survey (n = 503) was delivered across Canada to persons in roles responsible for hiring and people management in companies with at least 50 personnel. Respondents held Managerial roles (42%), Director roles (20%), C-level, president, or Vice President roles (20%), were owners (6%), or were HR professionals or hiring managers (12%). Just over half of respondents identified as men (55%), and just under half as women (45%), while fewer than 1% identified as gender non-conforming or non-binary.

Compared to the Canadian economy, the ICTC employer survey over-represents respondents from Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services; Manufacturing; and Finance, Insurance, and Real-Estate; as well as Wholesale and Retail Trade and Educational Services. Furthermore, the survey under-represents respondents from Health Care and Social Assistance, Construction and Utilities, Transportation and Warehousing, and Accommodation and Food Services. Just under half of respondents (41%) were from large companies of at least 500 personnel: this marks another large difference between survey respondents and the economy as a whole: most Canadian businesses are very small (1-4 personnel).²²⁴ About a third (35%) of respondents were from medium-sized businesses (100-499), and a quarter (23%) came from businesses of 99 or fewer.

224

Statistics Canada, "Table 33-10-0661-01 Canadian Business Counts, With Employees, December 2022," February 20, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3310066101>



Large businesses are responsible for the highest proportion of employment in Canada: companies of 500+ personnel employed 46% of Canadians in 2022.²²⁵ Accordingly, while employer survey data should not be used as a proxy for the Canadian economy, respondents describe policies impacting many jobs. Predominantly, respondents are from larger companies in the professional, financial, technical, and social services sectors, manufacturing, and trade. As personnel from larger companies, employer survey respondents are a unique sample of people managers and hiring managers with resources to implement inclusion training and other related policies.

Web Scraping:

ICTC collected over 2 million job posts between April 2022 and October 2023 in order to assess what types of jobs are in demand in Canada, where these exist, and what transferable technical and human skills they (job postings) are asking for. Job posts were scraped weekly from various job boards (including Indeed, Wowjobs, and Simply Hired). Duplicates were dealt with using an algorithm that identifies exact matches across fields such as company name, job title, job posted location and date. For exact matches, only one is kept. This check is performed on weekly scraped data. The list of relevant job titles the scrape is based on comes from in-demand jobs named in the employer survey, along with other roles appropriate to the study scope (e.g., manager-related titles to examine skills associated with advancement).

225

Statistics Canada, "Table 14-10-0215-01 Employment for All Employees by Enterprise Size, Annual," June 27, 2018, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410021501>

