Addressing Barriers to Employment for Immigrant and Racialized Women and Youth

What We Heard Report

Prepared for
Achēv's Advancing Equity for Immigrant and
Racialized Women and Girls Project

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Executive Summary

According to [Statistics Canada's Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (2005)](#), finding an adequate job is the number one challenge new immigrants' face since arriving in Canada. The same study shows that out of 157,615 immigrants to Canada, 72% searched for employment six (6) months after landing, and 66% accessed some form of education or training in the same timeframe ([Xue, Statistics Canada, 2007](#)).

Racialized immigrants encounter many challenges in settling and integrating into Canadian society. Factors such as language barriers, socio-cultural integration, and lack of both professional and social networks are critical during the transition process. As such, barriers to employment are especially detrimental during the integration process, impacting their access to safe and secure housing, childcare support and rebuilding all aspects of their lives, including their financial stability.

This *"What We Heard"* report highlights the results of online focus groups with immigrant and racialized women and young women from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), held between July 8 and August 18, 2022. Achēv's Women, Employment and Newcomer Services collaborated with a social enterprise, SEASONOVA, with women facilitators with lived experiences as racialized immigrants. In collaboration, Achēv and SEASONOVA developed and facilitated 16 virtual focus group sessions where 119 immigrant and racialized women and youth from the GTA discussed employment barriers they encountered whilst pursuing entry to Canadian workforce, including the additional challenges of the global pandemic. The participants also shared recommendations on how to address these barriers.

The focus groups included eleven (11) sessions for immigrant and racialized women, aged 26 years and above, and five (5) for young women ages between 18 and 25 years old. The goal of the focus groups was to capture the nuanced experiences of immigrant and racialized women in the Canadian labor market and the barriers they have encountered during the job application process and in the workplace as an employee. Participants of the focus groups included permanent residents, refugee claimants, international students, and generational immigrants, which means that they are Canadian born to one or more immigrant parent or grandparent. Regardless of their immigration status, all participants self-identified as racialized women. In addition, over half of women self-identified as newcomer immigrants to Canada, arriving less than ten years ago. At the same time, a third of young women indicated they were born in Canada.

The responses from the focus groups for women and youth revealed that they experienced employment barriers to varying degrees, often connected to their intersectional identities of gender, racialization, immigration status, and language. These barriers included employers' licensing and experience requirements, workplace bias, lack of social networks, and the additional challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In particular, a 2020 analysis released by Statistics Canada found that "immigrants are disproportionately represented in jobs with greater exposure to COVID-19, (with) 34% of front-line/essential service workers identify as visible minorities (compared with 21% in other sectors). Visible minorities are also more likely to work in industries worst affected by the pandemic, such as food and accommodation services – compounding health and economic risks". Although not limited to the pandemic, incidence of harassment and discrimination increased during this globally tumultuous time. The same Statistics Canada (2020) study found that "immigrants and visible minorities are more likely to report facing harassment, attacks, and stigma".

Despite these challenges, many immigrants demonstrate resilience and perseverance in pursuit of meaningful employment, and thus contributing to their economic security and the development of the Canadian economy.

The following are the five key themes recommended by immigrant and racialized women to address the employment barriers they have encountered in the Canadian labor force:

1. Remove employment barriers that prevent the transferability of skills, and past credentials and experiences to the Canadian workplace.
2. Consider targeted recruitment opportunities, including co-op and internships for racialized and marginalized groups.
3. Provide cultural competency and other EDI-related training to hiring managers and staff.
4. Improve the process of recruitment and hiring by shortening job application processing times and implementing measures to alleviate recruiter bias.
5. Explore various avenues to diversify a work team or workplace.

One of the key recommendations from focus group participants is to consider alternatives to hiring requirements that had better evaluate prior experience and accreditation earned outside of Canada. This includes implementing processes to reduce the influence of bias in hiring which includes both the screening of resumes and in the interview process, and to cultivate a diverse and inclusive work environment.

These recommendations are not solely for employers but are equally applicable to employment agencies and organizations, governments, professional associations, and licensing bodies. The report concludes with 35 specific recommendations that can be explored by employers, employment agencies and organizations, professional associations and licensing bodies, governments, and researchers as we are all relevant actors in this employment ecosystem that, through our action and collaboration, could positively contribute to a systems-level change for immigrant and racialized workers in Canada.

Section 1.0 Project Overview

1.1 Introduction

Achēv's *Advancing Equity and Women and Girls* project aims to promote the economic security and prosperity of immigrant and racialized women in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The project's goal is to address systemic barriers to employment to support women's equality by:

- Advancing inclusive policies and practices,
- Supporting positive distribution of authority, voices, and decision-making, and
- Increasing networks and collaboration with key stakeholders and employers.

To complete this work, Achēv partnered with Women and Gender Equality Canada, YWCA Toronto, Rexdale Women's Centre, and SEASONOVA – a BIPOC and immigrant led-social enterprise that helped co-lead the consultation process.

1.2 Engagement Approach

This *What We Heard* report highlights the feedback received from the consultation phase of the *Advancing Equity and Women and Girls* project consisted of 16 focus groups held from July 18, 2022 to August 8, 2022. All focus groups were 1.5 hours in length, held virtually via Zoom. All the sessions were held in English and the facilitation team included immigrant and racialized facilitators and moderators with relevant lived experiences.

Eleven focus groups were held with 87 immigrant and racialized women ages 25 and older, and another five sessions were held with 30 immigrant and racialized young women between the ages of 18 and 24. Achēv led the recruitment and registration of participants, including recruitment and outreach via email, social media, direct outreach with various professional and personal networks, and with collaborating organizations. To participate, the following eligibility criteria were used during the recruitment phase of the consultation:

Sessions with women:	Sessions with young women:
• 25 years and older • Identify as a recent immigrant (1 to 10 years) • Identify as a woman of color • Have experience navigating the Canadian labor market (e.g., looking for employment, being recruited, etc.)	• Be between 18 and 24 years old • Identify as a recent immigrant (1 to 10 years) and/or • Identify as a woman of color (raised or born in Canada) • Have experience choosing a career path and looking for a job or working full/part-time

In addition, the geographical focus of this research was the GTA, and most participants indicated that they were based in Toronto, Mississauga, and Brampton. A consent was received from all participants, and they were provided a $50 gift card as a modest honorarium.

1.3 Guiding Principles

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), and intersectionality were central to our approach as we collaborated to design and facilitate this consultation process. These principles were integrated into both the process and content of the focus groups such as:

- ensuring that there are various dates and times to allow for participants with various schedules and time commitments,
- using inclusive and plain language in the materials,
- providing both verbal and written prompts and avenues to engage,
- establishing an agreement for a welcoming and respectful space,
- providing contact information for mental health services should it be required,
- being able to self-identify during the initial survey, and
- Using Gender-based Analysis Plus in the analysis of the feedback, when possible.

Our team of facilitators and moderators have direct lived experiences as immigrant and racialized women and youth. Not only was there representation and empathy, the facilitation team was intentional and mindful to ensure that everyone's lived experiences were welcomed and heard.

1.4 Participant Demographics

This section highlights the results from both an initial survey that was provided to participants to capture their self-identified socio-demographic information, as well as Zoom polls that were asked at the focus group sessions to enable a GBA Plus analysis.

A total of 117 women participated in the 16 focus groups with 87 (or 74%) in the women sessions, and 30 (or 26%) in the youth sessions. Most of the participants (94%) self-identified as being a cisgender woman, with only six (or 5%) as gender diverse. A higher proportion who participated in the women's session self-identified as an immigrant (81% or 70 women) compared to those who attended the youth sessions (57% or 17), where more youth participants were born in Canada and are second or third-generation Canadians. In general, 3 out of 4 focus group participants (or 75%) are immigrants, born outside of Canada. More than a third of women participants (35% or 30) recently arrived in Canada within the last three years, compared to only 23% (or 7) from the youth sessions. Similarly, a higher proportion of youth participants were born in Canada (43% or 13 young women) compared to 19% or 16 women.

When asked if the women arrived before or during the COVID-19 pandemic, 74 participants responded, and just over a quarter (27% or 20 women) immigrated to Canada during the pandemic. A smaller portion of youth (10% or 2 young women) indicated that they arrived in Canada during the pandemic. All of the participants shared that arriving during the pandemic made it difficult to transition to a new environment including challenges in navigating the Canadian labor force.

Table 1. Self-identified demographic information of participants

Gender	Women focus groups		Young women focus groups		All participants	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Cisgender women	82	94%	28	93%	110	94%
Gender-diverse	4	5%	2	7%	6	5%
Total	87	100%	30	100%	117	100%
Place of birth	Women focus groups		Young women focus groups		All participants	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Immigrant	70	81%	17	57%	87	75%
Born in Canada (including generational immigrant)	16	19%	13	43%	29	25%
Total	86	100%	30	100%	116	100%
Length of time in Canada	Women focus groups		Young women focus groups		All participants	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
0-3 years	30	35%	7	23%	37	32%
4-6 years	19	22%	3	10%	22	19%
7-9 years	7	8%	3	10%	10	9%
10 or more years	14	16%	4	13%	18	16%
Born in Canada	16	19%	13	43%	29	25%
Total	86	100%	30	100%	116	100%

Overall, 35% or 41 women, self-identified as Black woman, followed by 20% or 23 South Asian women. The proportion of Black women was higher in the women focus groups (at 41%), compared to the youth sessions (at 19%). In the youth sessions, a higher proportion of East Asian and South Asians participated at 32% or 10 participants each.

Table 2. Self-identified racial identity and/or ethnicity of participants

Racial identity/ethnicity	Women focus groups		Young women focus groups		All participants	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Black/African and Black/Caribbean	35	41%	6	19%	41	35%
Latin American (Colombian, Ecuadorian, Mexican, etc.)	8	9%	2	6%	10	9%
East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.)	8	9%	10	32%	18	15%
South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, etc.)	13	15%	10	32%	23	20%
Southeast Asian (Cambodian, Vietnamese, Philippines, etc.)	6	7%	0	0%	6	5%
Southwest Asian and Middle East (Egyptian, Syrian, Iranian, etc.)	14	16%	3	10%	17	15%
White/European (English, Irish, Italian, Polish, etc.)	2	2%	0	0%	2	2%
Total	86	100%	31	100%	117	100%

The majority (or 87%) of women who participated in the focus groups completed post-secondary education, including a university degree (51%) or a college or trade school certification (36%). In comparison, four out of the five young women (or 80%) indicated that they are still currently completing post-secondary education.

As of the time of the sessions, 56% (n=48) of women participants were engaged in the labor force including 50% who were employment and 6% who started their own business or nonprofit organization. The other 44% of women (or 38) were unemployed including 11 who were currently pursuing more education. In comparison, more youth were not actively looking for work (67% or 20 participants) as they continue their studies. Another 23% (or 7) indicated being employed full-time or part-time, and only 10% or three youth participants stated that they were currently seeking employment.

Table 3. Self-identified educational background and employment status of participants

Level of education	Women focus groups		Young women focus groups		All participants	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
University or post-graduate degree	42	51%	6	20%	48	42%
College degree, trade school, or certification	30	36%	0	0%	30	27%
Currently a student	0**	0%	24*	80%	24	21%
Some post-secondary, high school or less	11	13%	0	0%	11	10%
Total	83	100%	30	100%	113	100%
Employment status	Women focus groups		Young women focus groups		All participants	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Employed	43	50%	7	23%	50	43%
Other / Started my own company or nonprofit organization	5	6%	0	0%	5	4%
Unemployed	27	31%	3	10%	30	26%
Currently a student	11**	13%	20*	67%	31	27%
Total	86	100%	30	100%	116	100%

* Note that some participants who are currently enrolled in post-secondary education are also employed and have selected "employed" rather than "currently a student."
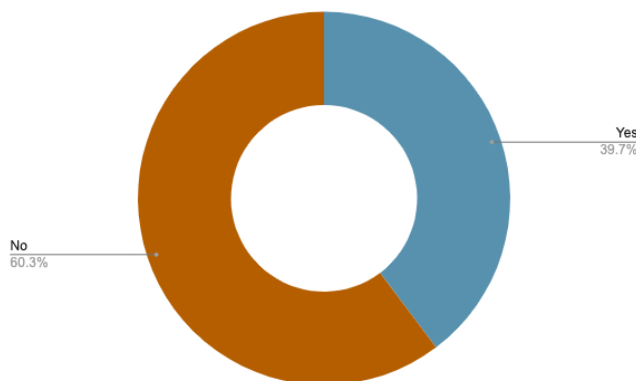** Note that 11 women indicated that they are currently a student when asked about their current employment status.

1.5 Professional background, aspirations, and career changes

Before immigrating to Canada, many women (35%) worked in professional services. Participants also worked in the retail and services sector (31%) and as healthcare professionals (17%). Where the women worked changed drastically upon arrival in Canada. The proportion of immigrant women working in professional services decreased by 29 percentage points to 6% which is indicative of the challenges immigrant and racialized women face in joining the labor force. The same trend was observed with healthcare workers, which dropped from 17% to 10% before and after arriving in Canada. Consistent with these negative trends is the increase in the proportion of women unemployed, from 5% to 35%, and the slight increases in the retail and services sector (an increase of three percentage points) and self-employment (an increase of five percentage points). These results indicate a significant pivot in their professional lives due to barriers to employment encountered since immigrating to Canada.
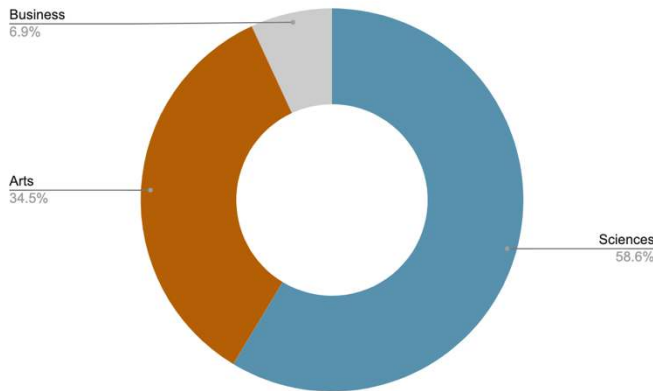
Table 4: Professional background of immigrant and racialized women before and after arriving in Canada

Professional background	Before arriving in Canada		In Canada	
	#	%	#	%
Science/Technology sector	3	5%	2	3%
Retail / Services Sector	20	31%	27	34%
Healthcare professionals	11	17%	8	10%
Professional services	23	35%	5	6%
Trades and Skilled work	3	5%	3	4%
Self-employed or Business Owners	2	3%	6	8%
Unemployed or attending school	3	5%	28	35%
Total	65	100%	79	100%

Yes 39.7%

No 60.3%

Figure 1. Alignment between previous education and career to current employment in Canada, women participants

When asked if they are currently working in a job that matches their education or previous career, either from their home country or what they studied in Canada, over half (60% or 44 women) indicated that their current job does not align with their education or previous career. Another 29 women (or 40%) shared their education or previous career does align with their current employment.

Four out of five (or 80%) of the young women who participated in the focus groups were currently pursuing post-secondary education. More than half (55%) have studied or are currently studying in the faculty of science. More specifically, their responses ranged from biomedical sciences, life sciences, and computer and technology studies. The second largest category of respondents' study (ied) in the faculty of arts (32%).

Figure 2. Educational background or aspirations of youth participants

A third of the young immigrant and/or racialized women (11 or 33%) were employed in professional services in the areas of engineering, law, education, and financial services. This is followed by another 30% who were employed on campus, including research-related employment.

Table 5: Current professional background of immigrant and racialized young women focus group participants

Current area of work	#	%
Research/campus work	10	30%
Retail or services	1	3%
Healthcare	1	3%
Professional services (engineering, law, education, banking, etc.)	11	33%
Unemployed, attending school, volunteering	7	21%
Total	30	100%

When asked about their dream profession, a third (33%) of young women indicated that they aspire to work in the health field. This proportion is significantly more than the current numbers of young women focus group participants who were working in healthcare (at 3%). Where the proportions align is in the area of professional services as almost a third of youth (or 30%) aspire to work as professionals such as engineering or law.

Table 6: Dream profession of young women participants

Dream work	#	%
Education	4	12%
Healthcare	11	33%
Social services/public service	3	9%
Business	2	6%
Professional services (engineering, law, etc.)	10	30%
Total	30	100%

Out of 78 responses, 56% of immigrant women participants indicated that they changed their careers since arriving in Canada due to employment barriers they encountered. More than a quarter (or 27%) indicated that their career path has remained relatively stable and unchanged, while 16% were unsure.

In contrast, when youth participants were asked if they have to work in a job that is outside of their interest areas due to employment barriers they will face in the Canadian labor market; it was almost an even divide with 31% or 9 participants who indicated "Yes," and another 31% or 9 youth said "No." Slightly more young women, at 38% or 11 participants, shared that they are not sure what will occur in the future.

Section 2.0 Focus Group Findings

The focus groups were designed to capture participants' experiences with the Canadian labor market, focusing on the barriers they have encountered during the job application process and their experiences once employed. The participants also discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their educational and career paths, as well as essential considerations in accepting a job offer, availability (or lack thereof) of employment support and resources, and recommendations on how to better support racialized and immigrant women.

The feedback from participants affirmed the negative trend that they all experienced varying employment barriers often connected to their intersectionality. For example, all participants indicated they lacked social capital and social networks such as a mentor, sponsor, or champion who could open employment opportunities for them. This lack is common regardless of the place of birth and spans across generations. All participants also experienced the results of intersectionality between age, racialization, and gender, as participants shared stories of exclusion, macroaggression, harassment, or discrimination during the interview process and while at work. The purpose of the questions about self-identification during the application process was either unclear or untrusted, especially for Canadian-born racialized applicants. This distrust affirms the necessity for authentic and clear communications about what organizations will do with the personal socio-demographic information they are collecting from applicants.

In addition, we found that most immigrant and racialized women were either hesitant to engage in or were unaware of the existing reporting mechanisms or their rights as workers that offer protection against workplace maltreatment. Some immigrant participants, especially those without permanent residency status, fear reporting workplace harassment could jeopardize their immigration application or status. A 2017 study by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) on Harassment and sexual violence in the workplace aligns with the stories shared by the women in the focus groups as 60% of respondents out of 1,205 participants indicated that they experienced harassment, and 30% indicated that they experienced workplace sexual harassment. "Stakeholders raised the importance of looking at harassment from the perspective of gender-based violence and other forms of discrimination. Among survey respondents, 94% of those who reported experiencing sexual harassment were women, while people with disabilities and members of a visible minority were more likely to experience harassment than other groups" (Ibid.).

Immigrant participants also commonly mentioned the barrier of unrecognized foreign credentials. According to research by the Library of Parliament (2020), the process of recognizing foreign credentials is "different in each province and territory, and for each trade and profession. It is particularly challenging for applicants in regulated occupations, which account for about 20% of the Canadian labor market. The complexity of the process can contribute to difficulties in integrating immigrants into the labor market and to their over-qualification". The report also highlights that the "responsibility for the recognition of foreign qualifications generally rests with the provinces and territories", and intergovernmental collaboration is necessary as immigration remains to be within the federal jurisdiction.

A socio-economic divide is also highlighted, as economic barrier exists for immigrants who cannot financially support whatever is needed to acquire their accreditations in Canada, such as taking more courses, writing an exam, and paying for professional fees. For most immigrants, an immediate source of income is critical to ensure their families' transition into Canada. This immediate need puts them at risk of underemployment and underpayment. Instead of working in the same fields as in their home countries, they risk being boxed in lower-paying jobs for the sake of immediacy. A 2020 study from Statistics Canada affirms this finding as there remains a persistent over qualification amongst immigrants in Canada.

In addition to the challenges posed by their foreign credentials not being recognized, the participants' lack of Canadian experiences, the challenges of reaching international references, especially from a non-Western nation, and language and socio-cultural barriers are pronounced during the focus group discussions.

Participants expressed concerns surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic that led to job shortages, layoffs, or even voluntary departure from the workforce due to the double burden of family care and responsibilities, severely impeding one's ability to remain employed, especially for racialized and immigrant mothers. For some, the pandemic led to reevaluating and redirecting their career and educational paths. All participants shared concerns regarding their health, including mental health challenges such as isolation and burnout and fear of spreading COVID-19 to loved ones, particularly elderly family members, as unique challenges brought on by the pandemic.

2.1 Focus group findings with immigrant and racialized women

2.1.1 Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

Participants highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their ability to find and retain a job or advance their careers. As many businesses closed or had to reduce or pivot their operations due to the pandemic, the job search became more limited and challenging. A recent graduate participant began looking for work just as the first COVID lockdown began stated that the "job search was difficult…I am currently unemployed and caring for my children." Another participant raised the issue of job security due to the pandemic, explaining how it is "difficult to get a job that pays well and is permanent. Most jobs are casual, short term or contract based." Some participants shared that the pandemic delayed their accreditation process as certification or licensing programs were temporarily paused during this time. One participant, a dentist, explained how "certifications for dental programs were on hold during the COVID times" and that this caused them to look elsewhere for work. Some participants expressed how they had to rethink their career paths, even returning to school to learn new skills, trades, or professions or upgrade what they already had. Some also decided to become self-employed and run their businesses.

Layoffs, the reduction of hours and pay, and the termination of contracts caused significant financial stress for some participants. For example, a mother of two special needs children who lost her job during the pandemic noted that "gentrification, [being] threatened with eviction, [it's] a lot to shoulder." Another participant expressed the added stress of the "constant fear of losing [their] job," intensified by the fact that they are a renter because a "missed rent can result in eviction." These factors contributed to the decline in mental health reported by some participants. In addition, self-isolation and separation from family and friends caused heightened emotional stress and, for some, a depressive state.

The impacts of the pandemic exacerbated the double burden of care, where women working outside the home are also responsible for domestic labor within the home including childcare and/or caring for elderly relatives. Many participants expressed being unable to seek employment opportunities or keep their businesses open as a result. Caring responsibilities significantly increased because of the lack of external support during the pandemic. Participants also shared that some had to quit their jobs or close their businesses to care for their families during the pandemic, as one participant shared how she had to leave her job in 2020 because "there were no daycare services available to care for my daughter and [allow me to] continue working."

It is important to note as well that for some participants, the pandemic brought positive changes to their careers or businesses. One participant, who lost her job due to business closure, was able to secure another job in a different field, stating, "COVID gave me a better job." Another participant mentioned that she was able to work internationally because of the openness of virtual work. Participants reported that because of weathering the pandemic challenges, they have also learned to be resilient and discovered creative and alternative ways to address the barriers they faced in the labor market.

2.1.2 Pre-employment experiences of immigrant and racialized women

Participants shared their experiences while looking for employment, including:

- The application and interview processes,
- The factors they consider when applying and when accepting a job offer, and
- The employment supports that they have accessed.

The application processes
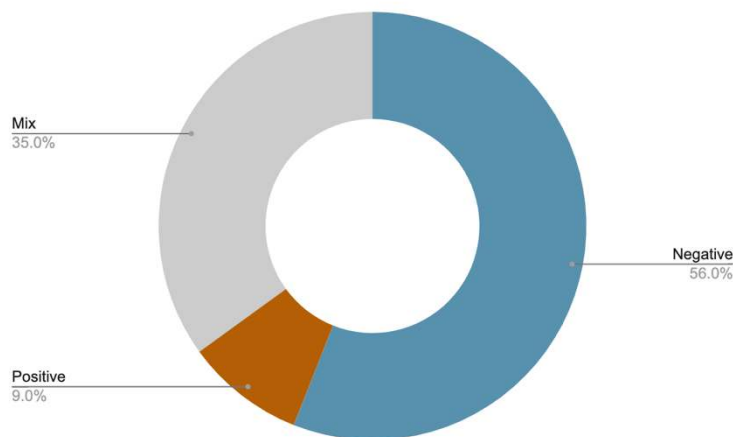
Over half (56%) of the 66 respondents indicated they had negative experiences with the job application process. Another 35% had a mix of negative and positive experiences, and only 9% indicated that their experiences in the job application process have been positive.

Figure 3. Job application experience of immigrant and racialized women

Challenges and barriers experienced during the application process

Based on the feedback from respondents, most (91%) have had at least one negative experience in the job application process, while under half (44%) would have had at least one positive experience since they arrived in Canada.

The following themes highlight the challenges and barriers that were encountered during the job application process as expressed by the 87 immigrant and racialized women participants:

1. Most participants indicated a lack of Canadian experience as a significant barrier to seeking employment within the Canadian labor market.
2. Non-recognition of foreign accreditation and credentials was a significant barrier preventing participants from gaining employment.
3. Participants experienced discrimination due to intersectional personal and social identity factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, immigration status, religion, etc.
4. Lack of professional networks, referrals, and other job-related support and resources limited the possibility of being screened for an interview.

Theme 1. **Most participants indicated a lack of Canadian experience as a significant barrier to seeking employment within the Canadian labor market.**

Many participants expressed their frustration with being asked to demonstrate proof of Canadian work experience as newcomers to Canada. They expressed that it was almost impossible to obtain meaningful Canadian work experience. Their previous work experience from other countries, including the United States, was dismissed. Some women expressed that this barrier felt discriminatory. Participants suggested that considering applicants' work experience acquired outside of Canada could make the process more equitable to enable newcomers to gain the Canadian experience required by employers.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Lots of employers were looking for Canadian experience – discrimination of immigrants. Even though I had worked four years in the US and three years in Nigeria, because of [lack of] Canadian experience, it was difficult to get a job."*

- *"When I apply, they need Canadian experience - which is the first requirement. I take care of my kids –3 kids. I am taking care of them and working. Even with online jobs, they say, they want Canadian experience."*

- *"I had the experience of working for international organizations and working internationally, but I was astonished because I kept sending my CV and applying for jobs but no answer because I had no Canadian experience."*

Theme 2. **Non-recognition of foreign accreditation and credentials was a significant barrier preventing participants from gaining employment.**

Participants in the sessions shared that Canadian employers, especially in healthcare, engineering, law, and education, did not recognize their foreign-attained credentials and accreditation. Participants expressed encountering many administrative requirements, including writing and passing licensing exams, applying to be a part of professional associations, and producing documents from their home countries. All these processes take time, effort, and financial investments. For many participants, the practical choice was to seek any form of temporary employment. Unfortunately, this creates a new barrier as they risk being boxed in lower-paying and lower-status occupations compared to their careers before immigration.

Example comments from participants:

- *"…Red tapes for accreditation to be able to practice as a doctor and financial barriers."*

- *"I have a master's degree in education… I taught all levels of education in Nigeria. Most recent being high school. I tried to be a teacher at a high school, but I do not have the Canadian experience or accreditation/certification to teach here. So, I returned to a college to get the diploma for early year's education… Because there are accreditation barriers and Canadian experience barriers to practicing here as a high school teacher."*

- *"The main issue was that my qualifications back home did not match the ones required here. The main issue for newcomers is that their previous qualifications do not match."*

Theme 3. Participants experienced discrimination due to intersectional personal and social identity factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, immigration status, religion, etc.

Intersectionality is the overlapping of two or more personal and social identity factors that act to marginalize one further. Participants reported being discriminated against based on intersectional identity factors such as gender, race, religion, immigration status, and marital status. Some single women mentioned being passed up for a job opportunity because they were unmarried and had no children. Some participants expressed encountering bias built into the application software that seemed to filter out non-western or non-anglicized names during the screening process. Some adjusted the names they used on their resumes to counter this experience.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Applied for a bank position and I got the requirements. I was told by the recruiter not to use my real name, so I switched it and used a nickname, and two days later, I got a call for an interview."*

- *"Discriminatory algorithms filter names that don't sound European/Caucasian in origin. If you sound different or your name is different, the assumption is made that you won't fit into the workplace."*

- *"Jobs can be very competitive, and I find that sometimes, there have been racial biases. A friend who has the same schooling and same/similar job experiences has a European/White last name, gets more opportunities."*

- **"***As someone who is trying to transition into the trades, the issue with gender-based violence is a big issue."*

Theme 4. **Lack of professional networks, referrals, and other job-related support and resources limited the possibility of being screened for an interview.**
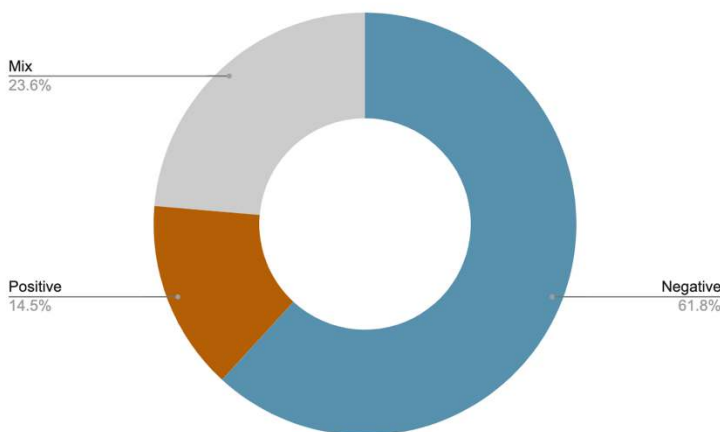
Participants shared they needed professional networks to assist them in navigating and integrating into the Canadian labor force and work culture. They believe that not knowing someone in the organization limits their chances of being screened for an interview. In addition, participants requested more nuanced employment supports based on their needs. Some expressed that they need support to develop resumes and cover letters or practice for an interview. However, others shared that they need support beyond the basic skills but would like more connections with their respective fields, such as a direct connection to an organization or help to navigate accreditation requirements, including support during the integration process.

Example comments from participants:

- *"...Understanding the keywords to mention in your resume/how to properly write about yourself can be challenging. How do I stand out as a job applicant? "*
- *"I discovered that I need networking and referrals, even if I'm qualified for the job."*
- *"...Not having strong references. Even having practicum from the school, and they still refused to give me a referral."*

The interview processes

When asked about their experiences during the interview process, more than half of immigrant and racialized women who participated in the consultations mentioned that they had a negative experience (55 women or 62%), while almost a quarter (or 24%) had both positive and negative experiences, and only 15% had primarily positive experiences. A slightly higher proportion of women encountered negative experiences during an interview compared to the application process.

Mix
23.6%

Positive
14.5%

Negative
61.8%

Figure 4. Interview experience of immigrant and racialized women

Challenges and barriers experienced during the interview process

The following themes highlight the challenges and barriers that were encountered during the job interview process:

1. Participants found the interview process to be stressful.
2. Macroaggressions and behaviours that express a lack of cultural sensitivity were experienced by immigrant and racialized women.
3. Participants felt that the Canadian interview style and format could be strengthened to assess candidates' skills more directly.
4. Participants received misleading impressions from interviewers or hiring managers.
5. Participants who shared that they had a positive interview experience credited organizations that were supportive of diversity.

Theme 1. Participants found the interview process to be stressful.

Participants shared various stories of stress during the interview process, regardless of how much they prepared for the interview. The women explained that this often led to lower self-confidence, negatively influencing their performance and interview experience. They also shared thoughts characterized by imposter syndrome, which "involves unfounded feelings of self-doubt and incompetence" and is often experienced by individuals from traditionally marginalized groups (Raypole, 2021).

Example comments from participants:

- *"It's nerve-racking, so my coach told me to research more about the company to be prepared, but when the interview comes, then you don't know what to say, and they say they like you, but they will not call you back."*

- *"I get nervous and lack confidence when in interviews, and what makes it worse is that when people see my name, they don't assume a person of color, but once they meet me, you can kind of get a vibration of their tone towards you. Especially in my industry in the Construction Engineering background which is still white and male-dominated."*

- *"Always get so stressed out when doing an interview…Standardized interviews, especially in the public sector/government work, are especially stressful because they are looking for really specific answers, which are marked on a scale relative to the answers of other applicants."*

Theme 2. Macroaggressions and behaviours that express a lack of cultural sensitivity were experienced by immigrant and racialized women.

Some participants did note that conversations and interactions are improving, as there is more awareness about equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). However, many participants shared that they experienced macroaggression from interviewers and hiring managers and explained that some of the comments received were culturally insensitive, inappropriate, and in some cases, disrespectful and condescending. Although things are shifting positively, inclusion requires intentionality in interview processes.

Example comments from participants:

- *"I don't know if it's my accent because they always ask "pardon me, what did you say?" So it made me worry, and I became more conscious."*
- *"I am always told I am very articulate and that my name is so exotic. This is subtle racism."*
- *"Better now than ten years ago. Before, I always got the "where are you from" and "where did you get your skin color from?"*
- *"I've had employers see the disability at the interview and didn't want to hire you after the interview."*

Theme 3. Participants felt that the Canadian interview style and format could be strengthened to assess candidates' skills more directly.

Participants expressed that the interview format or approach is a barrier and felt that it does not adequately assess a candidate's skill and ability to do the job well. They highlighted that as an applicant, participants thought they were trying to appease the hiring manager to ensure that their responses were what the manager was looking for rather than highlighting why they were the best candidate for the position. This discussion also pointed to the experiences of newcomer applicants who honestly provide responses based on the literal meaning of questions rather than the cultural nuances and expectations behind the questions. Some participants highlighted that they appreciated the interviews where questions were provided beforehand and suggested that this practice is equitable and should be adopted by more organizations.

Example comments from participants:

- *"It is like you are playing a game, where they are looking for a specific kind of response, and it kind of defeats the purpose of the interview. As though they are only asking a question for the sake of the interview, not to actually know you. For example, "What are your greatest weaknesses?" They don't actually want to know that."*

- *"Even if you have been trained in interview culture, it is really difficult to navigate. They assess your ability to improvise and spin an answer, not your actual personality/experience."*

- *"Sometimes interviewers can be cold and disconnected, which can create a lot of pressure, and you may think that you are not good enough. Sometimes you feel you have to constantly prove yourself as a racialized woman."*

Theme 4. **Participants received either misleading information or no feedback from interviewers or hiring managers.**

Several participants shared that they often left an interview feeling optimistic about getting the position, only to find out that they were not the successful candidate. In other cases, participants also shared that they received no feedback after and about the interviews, even after several attempts to contact the hiring manager. Several women also shared that they received misleading information, such as not being hired because they were overqualified, completing an interview where the position was already filled, or the job competition was subsequently cancelled.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Most interviews have been very misleading. I was made to believe something, and then the results were something else. There are a few cases where I was clearly qualified but still rejected without any feedback/clarity."*

- *"Frustrating. I was interviewed for a position that was already filled."*

- *"It would be good to have clarity and honest feedback rather than just a pat on the back."*

Theme 5. Participants who shared that they had a positive interview experience credited organizations that were supportive of diversity.

Several participants shared that interviews allowed them to learn more about the process, which they have since used to improve their performance at the following interview. A common theme also emerged from those who had a positive interview experience. Immigrant and racialized women found that organizations that supported diversity also found ways to integrate diversity principles into their hiring practices tangibly. For example, organizations that supported diverse students and volunteers found ways to retain them as staff. Similarly, providing the interview questions beforehand is an equitable practice that makes interviews more accessible for applicants.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Positive for me because they already knew me perhaps as a volunteer"*

- *"Some organizations work from an anti-oppressive lens and try to minimize the power dynamic in the interview and supply questions beforehand. If people really want the candidate to do their best, they should allow the candidate space to think about the questions first."*

- *"Positive. I was very fortunate to do my placement in a community mental health agency that embraces diversity. They sought me out because I speak a language they were looking for. I was hired before my placement ended."*

Considerations when applying to or accepting a job offer

The following themes highlight the factors that immigrant and racialized women consider before applying to or accepting a position:

1. Most participants indicated that a fair and competitive salary, adequate compensation, and benefits package were important considerations.
2. Participants considered work flexibility, especially regarding work shifts and work location.
3. Participants expressed the importance of the work culture aligning with their personal beliefs and values.
4. Opportunities for career advancement and professional growth were important contributing factors in deciding on a job offer.

Theme 1. Most participants indicated that a fair and competitive salary, adequate compensation, and benefits package were important considerations.

Wages and compensation were shared as an important consideration as the majority of the 61 respondents, or 55 women (90%) indicated that adequate wages and pay was an "important" or "very important" deciding factor when applying for a job or accepting a job offer. Considering wages is important as 73% participants (or 37 women) who were employed shared that they are not adequately compensated for their skills and background.

Example comments from participants:

- *"The first is the salary– a salary that is fair and competitive. The second is the benefits. Make sure you are being offered a benefits package that is fair and competitive"*
- *"Is the salary negotiable and enough for expenses?"*
- *"When I am considering a job, I always look at the salary."*

Theme 2. Participants considered work flexibility, especially regarding work shifts and work location.

Many participants indicated that it is important that their employer offer flexible work schedules, such as the ability to work remotely or in some hybrid format. They also mentioned the importance of flexibility with shifts, as many juggle family responsibilities. Related to this is the location of the work site, as long commutes are a detracting factor.

Example comments from participants:

- *"When applying for jobs, I first look for my travel time. I am not in a position to say no to anything, but if it takes me a long time to get to/from work, and I need to see my family, [then] this is a big consideration [for me] …"*
- *"Location and an easy community. Flexible work options in case of an emergency with the kids."*
- *"I also consider my needs right now. I am only looking for remote jobs and am not negotiating on that point."*

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Theme 3. **Participants expressed the importance of the work culture aligning with their personal beliefs and values.**

In considering accepting a job offer, many participants expressed the importance of the work culture aligning with their personal values and beliefs. Factors such as a healthy work culture that supports work-life balance, a diverse workforce where employees feel a sense of belonging, are valued, and treated equitably were important considerations for participants.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Work environment, culture and diversity is important [as well as] the management and how they treat their employees is important."*
- *"The first thing I consider is whether the company's values align with my personal values, [as well as] the company culture and whether it is a good fit for me."*
- *"I also look for diversity; I do not want to work in an all-white space. I need to have some racialized representation. I also do not want to work in a place that is male dominated."*

Theme 4. **Opportunities for career advancement and professional growth were important contributing factors in deciding on a job offer.**

Participants indicated that they consider if there are opportunities for career growth and professional development before accepting a job offer. Similarly, they consider how relevant the job would be to their future goals. For instance, they consider if there are opportunities for mentorship, and skills building in their area of interest.

Example comments from participants:

- *"If it matches my skills and background and has an opportunity for career advancement."*
- *"I look for professional and career growth."*
- *"I consider the work environment and the ability to grow within the organization."*

The following themes highlight how immigrant and racialized women engaged with employment supports:

1. More than half of respondents shared that they knew where to go to get support when looking for employment.
2. Immigrant and racialized women received various employment supports, ranging from information and training to coaching, mentoring and employment placements.
3. Some immigrant and racialized women had to navigate the Canadian labor force alone, while others received various employment supports from governments, not-for-profit organizations, universities, and private actors.

Theme 1. **More than half of respondents shared that they knew where to go to get support when looking for employment.**

Participants were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statement: "I know where to go to get support when looking for a job." Although there was a range of responses, 53% of the 61 respondents (or 32 women) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they knew where to get support when looking for employment. However, 19% shared that they did not know where to go to receive employment support.

Theme 2. **Immigrant and racialized women received various employment supports, ranging from information and training to coaching, mentoring and employment placements.**

The following lists the various types of employment support that immigrant and racialized women received while looking for employment in the GTA:

- Financial support
- Housing support
- Where to look for job postings
- How to apply for a job online
- Provision of resources and guidance
- Word of mouth / referral / advise
- Honorarium when participating in research
- Leadership training program
- Bridging volunteers or students to a more permanent position
- Workshops and training
- Coaching
- Practice interviews
- Support in developing resumes and cover letters
- Short-term contracts as a consultant, which gave Canadian work experience
- Specific program for women, and women in the STEM fields
- Co-op placement opportunities

SEASONOVA

Theme 3. Some immigrant and racialized women had to navigate the Canadian labor force alone, while others received various employment supports from governments, not-for-profit organizations, universities, and private actors.

The following lists the various actors that provided employment supports to immigrant and racialized women while looking for employment in the GTA:

- Self-help
- Families and friends
- Previous colleagues and employers
- Job coaches, recruitment and employment agencies
- Guidance counsellor or employment counsellor
- Recruitment agencies
- Support groups on social media, especially Facebook

- Not for profit organizations
- Governments
- Universities or colleges, including job centers on campus
- Social and professional networks
- Social media, blog posts and websites
- French language agencies
- Current and former employers or supervisors (especially for students)

2.1.3 Experiences while employed
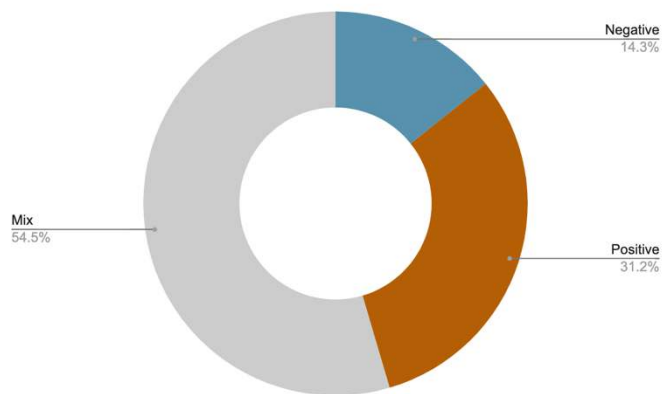
When asked about their experiences in Canadian workplaces, over half (55% or 42 women) indicated that they had a mix of both positive and negative experiences in the workplace. Less than a third (31% or 24 women) had mostly positive experiences, and 14% or 11 immigrant and racialized women encountered mostly negative experiences in the workplace.

Figure 5. Experiences of immigrant and racialized women in the Canadian workplace

Experiences of immigrant and racialized women in the Canadian workplace

The following themes highlight experiences of immigrant and racialized women in the Canadian workplace as they interacted with colleagues, supervisors, clients and customers:

1. Participants experienced a general lack of diversity especially amongst supervisors and managers.
2. Participants in Canadian workplaces experienced discrimination, ranging from macroaggression, exclusion to racism.
3. Participants experienced and were at-risk of experiencing workplace harassment, including verbal and sexual harassment.

Theme 1. Participants experienced a general lack of diversity especially amongst supervisors and managers.

Participants highlighted the lack of diversity in their workplaces, especially in management and senior leadership positions. They explained that workplace diversity was often only seen in lower positions, while other participants shared that they were encouraged to pursue promotion only to a certain point before the glass ceiling of management-level promotions appears for racialized staff. Participants also mentioned that this lack of diversity led to their experiences of exclusion and a lower sense of belonging.

Example comments from participants:

- *"At the workplace…people who have been working there for a while are not very welcoming when asked about information or how to do things. I feel that they are deliberately not laying it out and not making it easy when these are easy things to share. Also, with lots of group cultures, when a new person comes in, it is difficult to join these groups."*

- *"Management is also reflective of systemic inequalities. For example, a disproportionate number of cisgender men and white people as management. Even in organizations that are otherwise majorly racialized people."*

- *"As for managers or supervisors at my retail job, they are unaccommodating and do not respect people's decisions, i.e., sick days."*

- *"Non-profit [organizations] are more diverse, but it's only for front liners. Higher ranks are all white women and white men."*

Theme 2. Participants in Canadian workplaces experienced discrimination, ranging from macroaggression, exclusion to racism.

Participants expressed experiencing discrimination on various grounds including gender, ethnicity, language and accents, marital status, and age. The manifestation of discrimination in the Canadian workplace for immigrant and racialized women ranged from macroaggression, exclusion, to racism and sexism (see Theme 3). They expressed that they experienced these harmful exchanges from colleagues, supervisors, clients, and even, bystanders or third-party contractors.

Example comments from participants:

- *"I had a bad experience where at one point I was the only person of color in the workplace, and anytime something happened, a mistake was made, items misplaced, things happening off property----they would all come to me interrogating me. They tried getting the answer they wanted and wouldn't accept the truth until another girl stood up for me..."*

- *"... in the corporate world, it's like a men's club. Comments are made on my color and race –talking about the body stereotype of Latin women."*

- *"...Last year, I went to Kingston to redo a gym floor and met a man who has been in the job for 40 years. My colleague and I started to do our thing, and the first thing he said to me was, "How I love to see a woman pushing a broom." I told him to get into the 21st century…."*

Theme 3. Participants experienced and were at-risk of experiencing workplace harassment, including verbal and sexual harassment.

Participants expressed experiencing harassment, including sexual harassment, in their Canadian workplaces. During focus group sessions, participants recalled and shared incidents of being yelled at by supervisors and employers, as well as behaviors that constitute sexual harassment. Though a few indicated reporting such incidents, many did not report the incidents, as they were afraid of retaliation such as potentially losing their employment or jeopardizing their immigration status or permanent residency applications.

Example comments from participants:

- *"...I had a boss that would always yell at me, and I tolerated it thinking it was okay. But once it was too much, I yelled back, telling my boss that I am still under training and I can't be yelled at anymore- as things were not my fault…."*

- *"In the office always have negative connotations towards me. Yelling at me while other people are present – being confrontational."*

- *"…The guy [coworker] who sexually harassed me…, I felt very uncomfortable with him. Even when my colleagues intervened, the harasser did not stop. It stopped briefly, but then it ended up starting again…."*

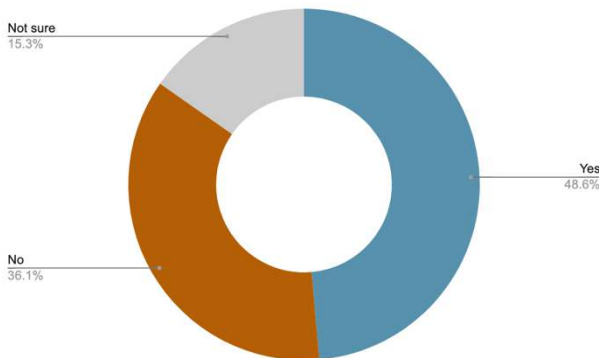### Experiences of discrimination in the Canadian workplace

Figure 6. Experiences of discrimination in the Canadian workplace
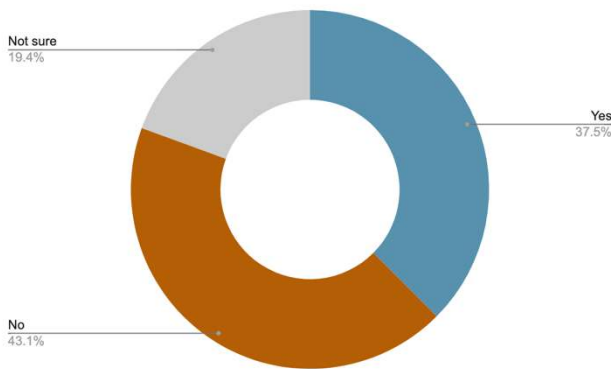
Of 72 participants, 38% (or 27 women) indicated that they experienced workplace discrimination, while 43% reported that they did not. These experiences of workplace discrimination included racial discrimination, exclusion or isolation by coworkers, delay of promotion due to being single, and being asked to change how they dress, including removing their cultural and religious emblem, when they go to the workplace onsite (e.g., in-person).

Experiences of macroaggression in the Canadian workplace

Figure 7. Experiences of macroaggression in the Canadian workplace

Almost half (49% or 35 women) shared that they experienced macroaggression in the workplace, such as being constantly interrupted or consistently having their name mispronounced or forgotten. In comparison, (36% *or 26 women) indicated that they did not experience macroaggression while 15% (or 11 women) were unsure if they experienced macroaggression at work.

2.2 Focus group findings with immigrant and racialized young women

2.2.1 Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the education and work experience of the young women who participated in this consultation.

The pandemic's impact on the education of immigrant and racialized young women

A participant expressed that she could not volunteer because of the pandemic, which negatively impacted her educational and career planning. High school graduates who transitioned to post-secondary education during the pandemic could not fully engage in their studies and make meaningful connections with other students or educators. The lack of networking and relationship-building opportunities, virtual schooling, and the unavailability of extracurricular activities left many youths unmotivated and disengaged.

Some youth also encountered challenges connected to a lack of access to technology due to limited economic resources. Some did not have their own computers or had older mobile devices. One participant notes that this lack made it hard to study, work, and apply for jobs, stating that because she shared a laptop with her family, she "only had the laptop late at night, and the internet was not accessible."

Many participants shared that the pandemic caused them to consider switching what they were studying, especially those in healthcare. One young woman reflected that she had wanted to work in healthcare since the start of high school. However, she stated, "as soon as COVID hit, it changed my vision for my career path [...] COVID showed me what my limits were."

Participants also noted that alternating between virtual and in-person classes made learning difficult, affected their school performance, and made their future educational paths unclear. Some courses were not offered that are prerequisites for graduation. Some participants in university also mentioned that they could not graduate on time.

The pandemic's impact on the careers of immigrant and racialized young women

Generally, participants noted that COVID increased their stress levels in part because they lacked the resources to ensure professional success during the pandemic. For example, participants shared that they experienced employment stability and professional growth challenges. Some were laid off during the pandemic and mentioned they did not know where to find another employment. As everything was done remotely during the early days of the pandemic, many young women said that they could not grow their professional network, which they believed could help increase their prospects for employment. One participant highlighted this as the case for newcomers, stating, "making work connections in person has been a challenge and makes the newcomer's work experience lonely and hard."

Health concerns expressed by immigrant and racialized young women

Some young women expressed concerns about contracting COVID-19 or bringing it home and exposing their family members. This anxiety affected their decisions regarding socializing, work opportunities, and the degree of their willingness to return to in-person learning. Many young women cited fears of compromising the health of elderly family members as a factor in their decision-making. A participant shared that these considerations made job searching more challenging as she had to look for "jobs that follow strict COVID guidelines in the workplace."

Personal health was also a concern amongst participants, sometimes clashing with employers' priorities. One participant shared that their employer denied their request to work remotely, stating, "They have to come into work."

The stress about health concerns, the instability of school and work, and the lack of employment opportunities created new mental health challenges and exacerbated pre-existing anxiety. While isolated from their friends, many immigrant and racialized young women found it difficult to find support and community. One young woman said, "[t]here was no support group, or somewhere I could vent or share my thoughts, and hearing someone else's thoughts would feel good." Virtual activities did not always fill this void. While some participants experienced the break from social interaction gave them space to reflect and rest, others experienced burnout from the challenges created or exacerbated by the pandemic.

2.2.2 Experiences looking for employment

The youth participants also shared their experiences while looking for employment, including:
- The application and interview processes,
- The factors they consider when applying and when accepting a job offer, and
- The employment supports that they have accessed.

The application processes
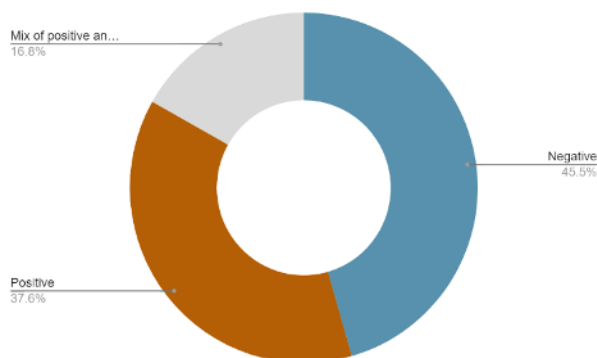
Out of 24 young women, nearly half (46% or 11) indicated that their experiences with the job application process had been negative, while 38% (or 9) stated that they had positive experiences. Another 17% (or 4 young women) indicated that the job application process had been a mixed experience.

Figure 11: Job application and interview experience of young immigrant and/or racialized women

Challenges and barriers experienced during the interview process

The following themes highlight the challenges and barriers that were encountered during the job application process including the interview phase:

1. The young women did not have supportive professional networks or direct connections to hiring organizations.
2. Being new to the labor force and not having previous work experience was a barrier experienced by the young women.
3. The lack of communication and feedback from potential employers did not match the youth's expectations.
4. The young women encountered macroaggression and discrimination during the application process.

Theme 1. The young women did not have supportive professional networks or direct connections in hiring organizations.

Several young women expressed that one of the primary barriers to successfully applying for jobs is a lack of professional connections and access to supportive networks. Not having contacts in the organizations, they had applied to be a disadvantage, especially when competing against applicants with internal and direct connections. The participants perceive unfairness as they view that selected candidates are not necessarily the most qualified for the position but rather those who are already connected to the organization. This (dis)advantage also occurs with jobs on campus, as the students who are often already familiar with the professors are selected for the open positions. However, many newcomers and international students expressed difficulty leveraging those relationships even if they have a good relationship with their professors due to not being Canadian citizens.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Even if you are more qualified for the job, a person that they know or have a connection will get the position."*

- *"For me, gaining references, supportive networks were difficult for me to find. Most of the professors looking for paid RAs preferred those who were citizens/PRs."*

- *"Getting references - that has been challenging, especially with COVID."*

- *"The culture at the school is very competitive and cutthroat and it is difficult to gain a supportive network."*

Theme 2. **Being new to the labor force and not having previous work experience was a barrier experienced by the young women.**

As new workers in the Canadian labor force, many young women shared that they felt that their limited experience was a barrier in both applying and interviewing for employment. Many participants cited examples of not knowing how to navigate the job application process, which includes writing resumes and cover letters, or cold calls and emails to employers. Newcomers and international students also shared that they have an added barrier of not having previous Canadian work experience.

Example comments from participants:

- *"No callbacks after applying for several jobs because [I was] lacking work experience."*
- *"Difficulty writing resumes or [completing] other [parts of the] application process."*
- *"Not having Canadian experience [was a barrier]."*

Theme 3. **The lack of communication and feedback from potential employers did not match the youth's expectations.**

Many young women shared that the lack of response and communication from potential employers was common and discouraging. This experience also points to the changing expectations of young workers compared to the established norms in the labor force of only getting a call back if an applicant is invited to participate in an interview. Some participants shared that they felt intimated to reach out during the application process if they had any questions, for not wanting to look less skilled. In addition, the young women also shared that they would like feedback on their interview performance even if they were not the selected applicant. Some youth highlighted that the delay in HR processes is also problematic as they are not able to wait long periods to find out the results of a job competition as their life circumstances may have changed during that time.

Example comments from participants:

- *"No response or a delayed response when applying to jobs online. It builds your hope up, and then you receive no response, or you get a response that is extremely late. By that time, you have already moved on and cannot accept the offer."*
- *"Whenever I attend interviews, I definitely do follow up, and some employers don't respond back. Some of them don't take my calls."*
- *"Sometimes I do not hear back from the recruiter."*

Theme 4. **Young women encountered macroaggression and discrimination during the application process.**

Some participants noted that they experienced exclusion, macroaggression, and discrimination based on their ethnicity and race, age, and not being Canadian. Participants shared that they continuously experienced the misspelling or mixing up of their names, inappropriate or culturally insensitive questions, and power dynamics because of their age. Some young women shared that they felt tokenized as the "diversity hire" which affected their self-confidence and inclusion in the workplace.

Example comments from participants:

- *"I experienced cultural discrimination from recruiters or employers. When I first came into university, I received advice from other Asian friends to leave out my traditional name when applying so that I could have a higher chance of getting an interview."*

- *"They asked me questions that I now know are illegal like my age and background."*

- *"They mixed up my legal name or misspelled it."*

- *"While the interview panel was diverse, the management staff was not."*

Considerations when applying to or accepting a job offer

Figure 12. Importance of alignment with personal and organizational values
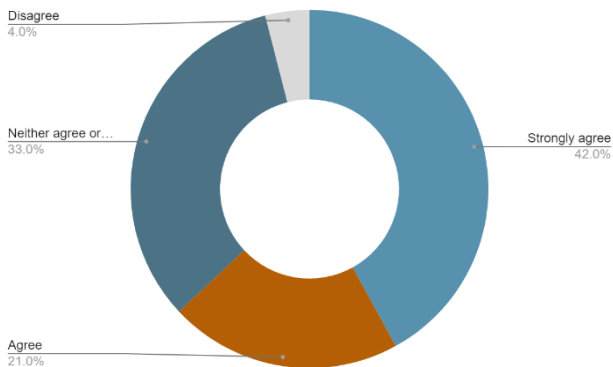
The alignment of an organization's values with personal values was an important factor for many young women. Out of 24 participants, almost two-thirds (63%) of youth agreed with the statement that they are more likely to accept a job if the organization's values align with their values. The other third of participants (33%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

When asked what they consider before applying to or accepting a position, immigrant and/or racialized young women shared the following:

1. Adequate compensation that aligns with their skills is an important employment consideration.
2. The young women indicated that they value work flexibility and a short commute and would prefer to work remotely.
3. The youth participants emphasized a work culture that is both diverse and inclusive.

Theme 1. Adequate compensation that aligns with their skills is an important employment consideration.

The majority (24 participants or 83%) of young immigrant and/or racialized women indicated that having adequate wages when applying for or accepting a job offer was important to them. This finding is a similar response to the women's cohort. A modest 17% of young women indicated that wages were not as important when making this employment decision. Most young women in paid positions (15 out of 21 or 71%) felt they were adequately compensated. This result is starkly different compared to the women's cohort, where most of them (37 out of 51 or 73%) indicated that they were currently underpaid compared to their skills and background.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Am I able to do that? Am I happy with that job or not? Then after, I will consider the salary. I will not accept a job if it's not worth it."*
- *"When I graduate, salary will be important because I want to stay in Toronto, and the cost of living is high."*
- *"Pay and benefits are important."*

Theme 2. Young women indicated that they value work flexibility and a short commute and would prefer to work remotely.

Many of the young women participants expressed the importance of work flexibility and a short distance and commute between their workplace and home or campus. Many wanted to avoid a long commute and the flexibility in their schedule, especially while balancing their school and work commitments. Several participants mentioned that they would prefer to work remotely.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Convenience and proximity to my house are important. Not having to travel and a job that can be flexible with my schedule."*

- *"I don't want to travel far."*

- *"Work flexibility is important being a full-time student."*

Theme 3. **The youth participants emphasized a work culture that is both diverse and inclusive.**

Notably, almost all participants emphasized the importance of work culture as a critical factor they consider whether to accept a job offer or not. The young women shared that a positive workplace culture includes a diverse, welcoming, and inclusive environment where there is positive communication between colleagues and managers. They also share that a positive workplace is low stress and provides opportunities for growth.

Example comments from participants:

- *"I want to know what the flow of power is in the organization."*

- *"Diversity of the organization and how they work to include marginalized populations is important."*

- *"Team cohesion and diverse representation on the job is important to me."*

- *"Values are important. I don't want to work with employers who exploit others."*

Knowledge of employment support and resources

Out of 29 youth respondents, 35% indicated that they know where to go to get support when looking for a job, while 28% indicated that they did not. However, more participants (11 or 38%) indicated that they neither agreed or disagreed with this statement or were not sure where to get support when looking for employment. The proportion of youth who knew where to get assistance is lower than the women cohort (at 53%) which suggests that youth could benefit from outreach efforts to raise their awareness about available employment supports.

Table 7. The young women's knowledge of employment support and resources

Responses	#	%
Strongly agree	4	14%
Agree	6	21%
Neither agree or disagree	9	31%
Disagree	6	21%
Strongly disagree	2	7%
I'm not sure/ Don't know	2	7%
Total	29	100%

Furthermore, the following themes highlight the employment resources and support received by the young women who participated in this consultation:

Theme 1. Social media and online resources are invaluable job-seeking resources for young women.

Overwhelmingly, the youth identified social media platforms such as Tik Tok, YouTube, LinkedIn, Reddit, and Instagram as critical resources for job seeking. As such, internet access was emphasized as needed support so that they could acquire helpful tips and insights through Google searches and watching creators on YouTube and Tik Tok. Many participants also noted that they primarily applied for jobs through online postings. Still, some participants indicated that support on the internet is generalized, and it is difficult to determine how to use them in their specific questions and unique paths. Some participants also mentioned the need to be perceptive online to filter out potential frauds and misinformation.

- *"I pretty much had to learn everything by googling and Tik Tok, so I found work like this freelance work through social media. And how to apply to work-study positions by YouTubers."*

- *"I applied for jobs through indeed or LinkedIn - if we have access to the internet, it's easier."*

- *"Reddit has been very helpful, social media [generally]: Reddit, Tik Tok, YouTube, and LinkedIn."*

- *"Personalized support is lacking; support on the internet is much generalized."*

Theme 2. **Peer-to-peer support and other campus resources were helpful for skill building.**

Participants expressed that they found support on campus through peer-to-peer networks like clubs and student-led resume and cover letter writing workshops. Additionally, they accessed job-seeking resources through university-run programs like career centers and advisors, who were able to connect them to research positions, internships, and employment opportunities. As students, many were also able to make connections with professors who were able to put them in contact with potential employers and other professionals.

Example comments from participants:

- *"University has been supportive in employment opportunities. Employment opportunities are all central, and it is easy to find on-campus opportunities or internship opportunities on campus. Resume and cover letter workshops were also helpful."*

- *" [There are] peer-to-peer support and clubs hosting workshops on resume and cover letter writing etc., also a lot of mentorship programs. The community was very helpful even if you don't know them; they offer help and help networking."*

- *"[I am] able to get jobs through professors, who connect [me] to other organizations/opportunities."*

2.2.3 Experiences while employed
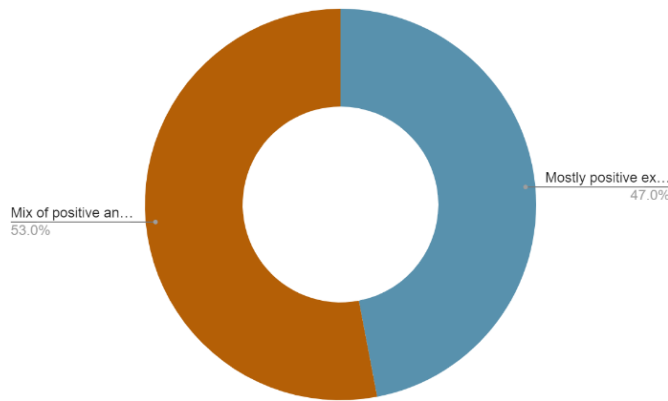
Figure 27. Experiences in Canadian workplaces

Out of 30 respondents, more than half (53%) indicated that their experiences in the workplace, such as interactions with co-workers, supervisors, clients and customers, have been a mix of positive and negative. In contrast, a slightly smaller percentage (47%) had mostly positive experiences. These results are comparable to the results of the women's cohort, with one significant variance being that, unlike the women's cohort, no youth indicated mainly having negative experiences in the workplace. Participants also highlighted the following examples from their experiences with interacting with co-workers, supervisors, clients or customers:

Theme 1. Young women face discrimination, stereotyping, and macroaggressions in the workplace.

Many participants expressed that they experienced various macroaggressions and forms of discrimination while on the job. This experience ranged from inquiring about their ethnic background to explicitly racist comments. Other macroaggressions included the use of incorrect pronouns, being isolated from other co-workers, and assumptions that they might not speak English. Some participants noted that it was challenging to adjust to work environments with which they were unfamiliar. Some changed how they spoke or adapted their personalities to engage with colleagues or the organization where they felt they did not belong or could not authentically express themselves.

Example comments from participants:

- *"I was the only Indian person [...] they did social activities without me, which made me feel left out."*

- *"Being asked questions like where I was born, implying that because I am of Asian ancestry, I must have been born somewhere else."*

- *"Language plays a role [...] you are expected to talk correctly all the time and dress a different way. It feels like I need a duo personality when I engage with people outside of my culture."*

- *"Because I am Asian, people assume I am quiet, and I was getting talked over."*

Theme 2. Young women frequently face ageism and misogyny in the workplace.

Participants often noted experiencing both ageism and misogyny while on the job. Experiencing these types of prejudice manifested as assumptions of incompetency or being uninformed on their assigned tasks. Further, many participants expressed being talked over and working harder to be heard or given workplace opportunities. Some youth also shared that they were asked to do more work than outlined in the job description because of their age. Participants also shared experiencing ageism from clients who treated them rudely due to their age.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Because I am young, I am walked on by colleagues [...] and also customers."*

- *"I experience ageism and people making assumptions that I don't know anything or care about a job. [There is a] mix of misogyny and ageism experienced from colleagues."*

- *"I find it difficult to get colleagues, supervisors, and people in positions of higher authority to give me opportunities of (better) work, to listen, to hear me out, etc."*
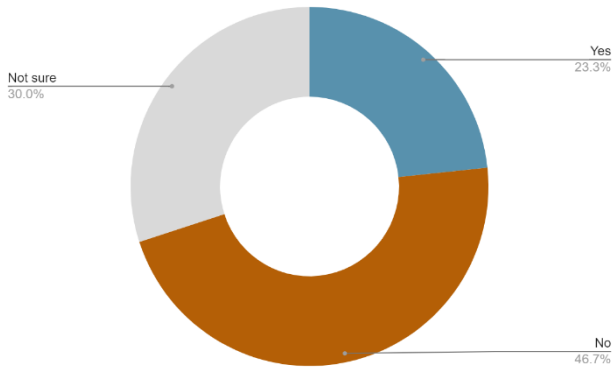
When discussing experiences of discrimination in the workplace, such as racial discrimination, exclusion or isolation, or being asked to change how you dress based on religious or cultural reasons, approximately 23% (7 participants) indicated that they had experienced discrimination at work, while 47% percent reported not having experienced this at work.

Figure 28. Experiences of workplace discrimination
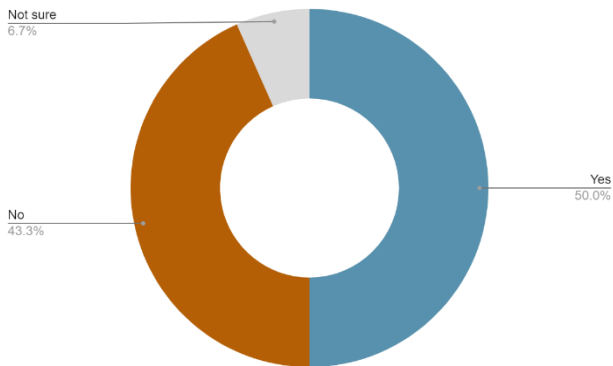
In contrast, half (15 participants or 50%) of participants indicated that they had experienced some form of macroaggressions in the workplace, while about 43% responded that they had not.

Figure 29. Experiences of macroaggressions in the workplace

Regarding improving diversity in the workplace, youth participants discussed the following suggestions:

Theme 1. Young women want employers to invest in people-centered employment practices and skill development programs.

Some participants expressed the importance of investing in employees and appreciating them as people first. They suggested that this includes the appreciation for their unique lived experiences and identities by recognizing that diversity is a strength for every workforce. This approach would require tangible action to meaningfully have and support (potential) employees from marginalized communities. Interestingly, youth participants suggested not asking for unnecessary demographic data during the application process as it might harm applicants from traditionally marginalized communities. Other participants noted that they are looking for workplace skills development opportunities. This investment would include programs (especially mentorship programs) tailored

to new graduates to help them acquire different skills needed to transition smoothly into the workforce or move forward in a particular career field.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Employers should think of it as investing in a person. Diverse workers from racialized and marginalized groups bring unique experiences, so the experience they bring add so much value to the workplace...diversity is strength."*

- *"[We need] open program opportunities. Corporate business had more programs available for new grads and was targeted towards giving people opportunities to develop skills."*

- *"Provide opportunities for career growth to diverse groups. Sure, there's been efforts towards giving opportunities to diverse groups, but there are not enough diverse faces I see in positions of senior management or executive levels."*

Theme 2. Young women believe that increased and targeted outreach will increase diversity in the workplace.

Many participants emphasized increased and targeted outreach through different channels to notify potential young employees of available opportunities. This outreach would include increasing employers' social media presence and posting job opportunities on various job boards, universities, and public spaces like local libraries. Further, some participants stressed the importance of being transparent about the essential skills required for the job and not requiring skills that could be learned on the job as part of the application, as it can serve as a deterrent for young women when applying.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Have a work social media with links for applications connected. Targeted/simplified online outreach."*

- *"The recruitment process is really important. [...] Jobs should also be better advertised. Posting on job boards and local libraries, and physical flyers."*

- *"[Outreach through] university boards and work fairs. Networking through job fairs will be good too. So for students who don't know people, they can get to meet employers at job fairs."*

Theme 3. **Young women stress the importance of shorter recruitment processes and interview feedback.**

Several participants voiced the need for a quick turnaround after submitting a job application regarding their success or rejection. This straightforward process is necessary, so applicants can plan accordingly and make better-informed decisions about their next steps. Additionally, many participants felt the need for a follow-up after an interview with feedback from the employer so they could better understand their strengths and areas for improvement, whether or not they were selected for the position.

Example comments from participants:

- *"[The recruitment process] needs to be shorter so people can plan for their future without waiting a long time for responses from employers."*

- *"Feedback after an interview, so they can improve in the next interview [...] would be helpful. Quicker communications [to avoid] schedule changes."*

- *"Just waiting for an update is hard [...] we don't hear anything back."*

Section 3.0 Intersectional comparative analysis of immigrant and racialized women and youth focus group sessions findings

Section 3.1 Women Participants

This section is a comparative analysis of participants' responses as compared to four (4) main categories, including:

- Level of Education (with post-secondary education or without post-secondary education)
- Place of Birth (born in or outside of Canada)
- Employment Status (employed or unemployed)
- Racial Identity (African descent/Black compared to non-Black participants)

Level of Education

Immigrant and racialized women with limited post-secondary education struggled to secure employment. Participants mentioned that their options were in concentrated in low-paying precarious employment including part-time or casual work, in general labor, retail, or in the service industry. Research from The Social Planning Council of Ottawa (2012) found that "the visible minority population is overrepresented in the service sector, which is characterized by precarious jobs". The women shared that they struggled to secure professional references when looking for new employment opportunities.

Although immigrant racialized women who had post-secondary education had more options, especially during the job application stage, as discussed above, their lack of Canadian experience and the employment barriers associated with foreign credentials did not give them better employment prospects, generally. Many of the women who attended expressed being screened out or not being hired for reasons of over qualification. Further systematic analysis is needed to review what kind of jobs immigrant women were applying to juxtapose to their educational background to verify the claims of over qualification. A 2020 study by Statistics Canada defined over qualification as "a situation in which university degree holders (bachelor's degree or higher) hold jobs that require no more than a high school education". Authors Louis Cornelissen and Martin Turcotte found that "the proportion of workers who were overqualified in both 2006 and 2016 was nearly 10% among immigrants and 4% among non-immigrants. Among immigrants, the location of study was an important factor in the risk of over qualification; 14% of immigrants who studied outside Canada experienced over qualification in both 2006 and 2016, compared with 4% of those who studied in Canada" (Statistics Canada, 2020). These findings affirm the stories shared by the immigrant women who participated in the focus groups.

Place of Birth

Racialized women born in Canada to immigrant parents highlighted that they did not have the social capital and networks, champions or sponsors, who can open educational and employment opportunities for them compared to non-racialized job applicants. Although immigrant women also mentioned the lack of professional networks, Canadian-born participants were more aware of these informal networks and word-of-mouth mechanisms to acquire jobs in the Canadian labor market.

Immigrant participants were also more likely to change careers and enter the skilled trades in Canada. A 2019 study released by Statistics Canada by Frank and Frenette found that "just over one in five (20.7%) female apprentices were in male-dominated programs." Participants in this focus group may experience a double bind of being a minority amongst minority as "immigrant women were less likely than Canadian-born women to select a male-dominated apprenticeship program" (Ibid.). As a result, immigrant women who switched to a career in the trades upon arriving in Canada were more acutely aware of gender-based discrimination, such as sexism and sexual harassment in male-dominated sectors.

Although all the participants shared their experiences of exclusion, macroaggression, and discrimination, immigrants also noted the lack of cultural sensitivities between different racialized groups. For example, one of the participants shared discouragement and disappointment for experiencing discrimination and macroaggression from fellow immigrants of a different ethnic background by refusing to work with them, excluding them at work by speaking another language, or not trusting them to care for their children in a daycare setting.

Employment Status

Similar themes came up between employed and unemployed participants. Employed participants expressed being underpaid, underemployed, or were placed in a situation to settle with whatever job opportunity they could find to maintain some income. Some mentioned continuing to look for full-time employment while at their part-time work. Some of the participants who were currently working shared that the arrangements are temporary and necessary, so that they can save up the funds needed to upgrade their qualifications and to complete the necessary exams associated with acquiring their Canadian professional licenses.

Participants shared different reactions when they faced barriers in the labor market. While some women who had medical background chose to complete the necessary requirements to practice in Canada, others pivoted their careers, left their medical practice, and instead joined the health sector in policy and administration. Other participants shared that they created their own businesses, such as a home-based daycare, while others decided to leave the labor force all together. This was the case for many participants who were caring for smaller children, especially those in frontline work during the pandemic.

Racial Identity

According to the 2019 General Social Survey (GSS) on the safety of Canadians, Statistics Canada (2019) found that:

- "Nearly half (46%) of Black people aged 15 years and older reported experiencing at least one form of discrimination in the past 5 years, compared to 16% of the non-Indigenous, non-visible minority population.

- Of all Black people, four in ten (41%) experienced discrimination based on their race or skin colour, about 15 times higher than the proportion among the non-Indigenous, non-visible minority population (3%).

- Experiences of discrimination were much more common among Canadian-born Black people (65%[E]) than among Black immigrants (36%)".

The Black and African-descent immigrant women who participated in the focus groups affirm these findings. For example, one of the Black participants disclosed that they experienced workplace sexual harassment, while another experienced discrimination from another immigrant and racialized woman. Some Black participants highlighted the lack of cultural competencies from potential employers during the interview and recruitment phase where interview panel members expressed, either in subtle words or in their manner speech, internalized feelings of superiority and anti-black racism. It is not surprising that some Black participants shared that they felt the need to downplay their qualifications and backgrounds to secure employment.

Section 3.2 Youth Participants

This section is a comparative analysis of participants' overall responses based on two (2) main categories, including:
- Place of Birth (born in or outside of Canada)
- Racial Identity (African descent/Black compared to non-Black participants)

Note that indicators regarding the level of education and employment status were not analyzed for youth participants given that all the young women were either currently pursuing post-secondary education or recently graduated. For similar reasons, the employment status of the youth was not analyzed further as most were not yet pursuing full-time employment, given that they remain to be students.

Place of Birth

Comparing participants born in Canada to those born outside of Canada includes immigrants and international students within youth participants, which is different from the women focus groups where they were mostly permanent residents. Similar to the women, however, youth participants who immigrated to Canada expressed barriers to employment regarding needing Canadian experience for job applications and gaining accreditation. What is different about the experiences of the young women, who participated, however, is the pathway to immigration taken by international students. Many of the young women international students shared about the barriers to employment that they had encountered because their potential employer did not want to complete the necessary paperwork required for the youth to apply for a work permit. Additionally, foreign-born youth participants voiced challenges reconciling cultural differences, including language barriers and differences in workplace culture and expectations.

Canadian and foreign-born young women who participated in the focus groups both expressed their lack of awareness or knowledge of where to look for work, how to gain professional networks and referrals, and a general lack of professional experience that would help them navigate the job market. These difficulties seemed to be exacerbated for foreign-born participants, particularly international students. Additionally, all participants, regardless of their place of birth, faced ageism, sexism, and other identity-based discrimination and macroaggressions (see below).

Racial Identity

Regarding differences between youth participants based on racial identity, an intersectional analysis was conducted to identify barriers to employment for the youth of African and Caribbean descent. Some of the Black youth made a note of macroaggressions that they faced in predominantly non-Black and White spaces. The experiences voiced by Black participants primarily reflect those articulated by non-Black racialized youth who participated in the focus groups, particularly surrounding racial discrimination, sexism, and ageism.

Section 4.0 Recommendations

The immigrant and racialized women and youth who participated in this engagement was also asked about what advise they would give employers on how to increase diversity in the workplace. The following highlights the themes gathered from these discussions:

Theme 1. **Remove employment barriers that prevent the transferability of skills, and past credentials and experiences to the Canadian workplace.**

Participants mentioned that employers' requirements for Canadian experience or a Canada-based education or credential were very limiting for newcomers. They expressed that experience and skills gained from foreign countries are equally transferable. They also advocated for an increased awareness and knowledge by Canadian employers, including HR professionals, on how to better assess the qualifications gained from outside of Canada.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Being screened out because of a lack of Canadian experience is not fair. If nobody is given a chance, how do we get Canadian experience in the first place?"*

- *"Consider foreign experience and education. This is now a mandate by the government. While this is progress, it will not work for jobs needing qualifications and certifications like nursing, doctors, lawyers etc. Therefore, there are ways to make this easier for these people. Increase the number of bridging programs, so people know about this, and these bridging programs will connect them with their field of study/work."*

- *"Cut down the Canadian experience requirement. Hire new immigrants and give them a chance."*

Theme 2. Consider targeted recruitment opportunities, including co-op and internships for racialized and marginalized groups.

Participants identified the need for co-op opportunities for international students and immigrants enrolled in post-secondary education or internship opportunities in general. This would allow newcomers to gain Canadian experience, which employers often cite as a requirement. Similarly, participants mentioned targeted recruitment efforts and designating specific competitions or job postings specifically for immigrants or racialized employees as an approach to diversifying their workplaces.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Taking out the barriers, everyone should have equality in taking a job – a co-op for newcomers to gain Canadian experience or training for newcomers to get a job."*
- *"Co-op opportunities / on-the-job opportunities for newcomers. Newcomers can [then] showcase their talents even if they are not getting paid the same as an experienced person, and people can get referrals from this for full-time jobs."*
- *"Targeted recruitment for certain roles, only open to newcomers to Canada, where possible."*

Theme 3. Provide cultural competency and other EDI-related training to hiring managers and staff.

Participants mentioned that one of the ways that can support their prospects of employment is ensuring that existing employees, especially those involved in the hiring process, have access to cultural competency training. This includes EDI training applicable to hiring, interviewing, and screening applicants to raise awareness and knowledge about the challenges that racialized, and immigrant applicants and employees face in the Canadian labor market.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Team education/diversity training matters – are we talking about anti-Black racism in the workplace? Are we talking about pronouns? People feel valued when you celebrate their culture, and they feel excited to work there and feel accepted."*
- *"Employers need to attend cultural competency or sensitivities training, as well as training on diversity and anti-racism."*
- *"Good ethical code and training on EDI and anti-racism – employers need to attend these."*

Theme 4. Improve the process of recruitment and hiring by shortening job application processing times and implementing measures to alleviate recruiter bias.

Participants stated employers need to improve the process of recruitment and hiring. Some participants expressed that the process typically involves long wait times, from applying to being invited for an interview. Some participants indicated the need for those involved to be more conscious about and exert effort to mitigate the influence of bias. They shared that all applicants deserve equal opportunity. Participants also mentioned the need to expand the channels for job postings and ensure their clarity and for employers to provide salary ranges in the job posting, thereby promoting transparency and pay equity.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Make the recruitment process faster! They take a couple of weeks to respond to an email. The period is too long to wait for a call/rejection email."*

- *"Recruitment: where are jobs being posted? Often it is only on indeed/charity village, but is there a way they can do ads in certain channels/communities/newspapers? It does take money to promote a job, but if they could post in different community centers, they would get greater diversity in the applicant pool."*

- *"I have been on hiring committees for workplaces, and there is too much room for unconscious bias. There needs to be a quantitative method to assess candidates and address this. For example, if you have interview questions, give each answer a score and base your decision on something numeric like that. It does not erase bias, but it might help."*

Theme 5. Explore various avenues to diversify a work team or workplace.

Participants expressed there are several concrete ways employers can take to ensure diversity in the workplace. This includes promoting a workplace culture that welcomes diversity, equity, and inclusion. It was also expressed that employers can strive to ensure gender equity in the hiring and retaining staff.

Example comments from participants:

- *"Posting salary ranges for the roles will allow for transparency, and that way, immigrants can know what to expect. Because they are exploited in this [area] and are underpaid."*

- *"There is a lot of exploitation that takes place in the workplace, where they are paid to do one job and, in reality, end up doing 2/3 jobs. It is important that women/immigrants/youth know their rights in the workplace where you create a culture where people feel respected and have opportunities for upward mobility and growth in the workplace."*

- *"Be inclusive, listen to what employees want."*

- *"Make sure that the effort to diversify is systemic, not surface level. Hiring a single BIPOC is not enough if there is no effort at changing the work, you do externally and internally too. It's also cruel to do that to a worker."*

As seen above, the participants shared and discussed approaches that may address employment barriers and challenges encountered by immigrant and racialized women. These recommendations are not solely for employers but are equally applicable to employment agencies and organizations, governments, professional associations and licensing bodies. The following 35 recommendations are identified and grouped into five (5) categories, which include:
- Recommendations for employers
- Recommendations for employment agencies and organizations
- Recommendations for professional associations and licensing bodies
- Recommendations for governments
- Recommendations for future research

4.1 Recommendation for employers

1. Find an alternative to the "Canadian experience" requirement, such as years of experience and education levels, internships or on-the-job training, or standardization exams.
2. Create internship, mentorship, or co-op opportunities for new graduates, racialized/immigrant women and youth to gain professional experience in their fields.
3. Increase opportunities when foreign experience can be readily transferable into Canadian workplaces.
4. Expedite the recruitment process and provide updates so that applicants know the status of their applications.
5. Provide feedback on interviews by outlining applicants' strengths and areas of improvement regardless of the hiring outcome.
6. Create targeted outreach and recruitment for young workers through varied channels, including social media, university recruitment programs, job boards, and public spaces, including libraries.

7. Create targeted outreach and recruitment for racialized and immigrant women as part of workplace diversification efforts.

8. Include salary ranges in the job postings to create pay transparency and pursue pay equity of equal pay for equal work.

9. Reduce the influence of bias in the application and hiring process, both from individuals and algorithms used. These safeguards include removing the names of applicants during screening, having precise screening tools, having marking grids, diversifying the hiring/interview panels, and allowing for internationally acquired job references.

10. Strengthen respectful workplace and workplace harassment policies with robust processes and practices that adequately mitigate risks and address complaints.

11. Develop and regularly provide training opportunities for employees, including management and leaders, to increase cultural competencies and EDI awareness and sensitivities in the workplace. Cultivate respectful and inclusive workplaces by having a respectful workplace policy and mechanisms to address workplace harassment and discrimination.

12. Create initiatives or opportunities to celebrate diverse cultures, cultivate cultural empathy, and promote a sense of inclusion for all employees. For example, providing an opportunity to share about their own culture through food and music with their colleagues.

13. Encourage the development and evaluation of EDI plans and include initiatives such as diversifying the workplace at all levels; ensuring that racialized staff are represented in various occupational groups and seniority levels; designating positions/competitions for immigrant and racialized employees; reviewing the impact of self-identified questionnaires.

14. Avoid the real and perceived occurrences of tokenism in the workplace. Address harmful myths, narratives, and ideologies around quotas, *"of immigrants taking jobs,"* and decouple the perspective that diversity hires are not as competent or are hired due to an accommodation with negative value judgments.

15. Provide flexible work options and schedules, such as remote or hybrid work, and flexible schedules to allow workers with care responsibilities to continue working.

4.2 Recommendations for employment agencies

1. Develop and provide more individualized or tailored support to meet the needs of diverse immigrants and racialized job seekers. For example, allow them to select the kind of support they need, as this can range from basic support, such as resume writing, to more complex and nuanced needs, such as accreditation requirements.
2. Provide opportunities for networking between clients and Canadian professionals in their respective fields and meet-and-greet opportunities with professional associations and potential employers to learn more about Canadian workplace culture.
3. Create initiatives that promote mentorship relationships between Canadian professionals and newcomers, immigrants, young workers, and new graduates.
4. Create initiatives such as training that can inform and empower racialized women and young workers and those new to the Canadian labor market on how to better advocate for themselves and navigate the different steps in the employment process.
5. Provide resources and services to support women seeking to be self-employed, and continue providing support as they build their businesses.

4.3 Recommendations for professional associations and licensing bodies

1. Consider reducing the financial costs associated with writing the licensing or accreditation exams, and offer subsidies, scholarships, or a payment plan to reduce the barriers experienced by newcomers to Canada.
2. Offer flexibility and availability in exam schedules to capture candidates with various time commitments.
3. Audit the accreditation requirements and processes to identify areas where they can be streamlined or areas where it creates significant barriers for newcomers and immigrants to Canada. Action the recommendations from the audit.
4. Explore opportunities to fast track the accreditation and licensing process even before the newcomers arrive in Canada to expedite the transition process. In this way, newcomers can also obtain the necessary documents from their home countries before arriving in Canada.
5. Collaborate and collaborate with immigrant settlement organizations to develop a pathway to quickly and effectively licensed professional immigrants that can fill the labor shortage.

4.4 Recommendations for governments

1. Develop and implement procedures to ensure that immigrant workers are not exploited in the Canadian labor force. Aside from protections against labor trafficking, explore increasing protections against workplace harassment, underemployment, or underpayment.
2. Implement anonymous and/or third party reporting mechanisms that ensure that immigrants experiencing exploitation or forced labor can report without fearing retaliation from the employer or losing their immigration status.
3. Develop policy and legislative mechanisms to promote an improved accreditation or licensing process for newcomers to Canada. Coordinate across jurisdictions.
4. Provide funding support for the not-for-profit sector to provide direct services and employment support to address and reduce the employment barriers experienced by immigrant and racialized women and youth.
5. Strengthen pay equity and employment equity legislation, such as enforcing accountability mechanisms, incentives for a diversified workplace, resources for mentorships, professional networking, and nuanced approaches and data for various ethnic-racial groups within the visible minority cohort.

4.5 Recommendations for future research

1. International accreditation requirements for various occupational groups by each Canadian jurisdiction
2. Pay analysis for immigrant women by occupational groups and jurisdiction to ensure pay equity
3. Employment differential gaps experienced by international students to explore their permanent residency pathways
4. Explore the use and impact of self-identified demographic information during the application process
5. Isolating the impact of racism and bias on the employment outcomes of racialized workers in Canada

Conclusion

In alignment with several studies on the economic integration process of racialized newcomer and generational immigrants in Canada, this public engagement has provided space to articulate and amplify the lived experiences of women as they navigate the Canadian labor market and workplace.

Racialized immigrants encounter many challenges in settling and integrating into Canadian society. Factors such as language barriers, socio-cultural integration, and lack of both professional and social networks are critical during the transition process. As such, barriers to employment are especially detrimental during the integration process, affecting their access to safe and secure housing, childcare support and rebuilding all aspects of their lives, including their financial stability. Despite these challenges, many immigrants demonstrate resilience and perseverance in pursuit of meaningful employment, and thus contributing to their economic security and the development of the Canadian economy.

The responses from the focus groups for women and youth revealed that they experienced employment barriers to varying degrees, often connected to their intersectional identities of gender, racialization, immigration status, and language. These barriers included employers' licensing and experience requirements, workplace bias, lack of social networks, and the additional challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the key recommendations from focus group participants is to consider alternatives to hiring requirements that had better evaluate prior experience and accreditation earned outside of Canada. Moreover, implementing processes to reduce the influence of bias in hiring which includes both the screening of resumes and in the interview process, and to cultivate a diverse and inclusive work environment.

These recommendations are not solely for employers but are equally applicable to employment agencies and organizations, governments, professional associations, and licensing bodies. The report concludes with 35 specific recommendations that can be explored by employers, employment agencies and organizations, professional associations and licensing bodies, governments, and researchers as we are all relevant actors in this employment ecosystem that, through our action and collaboration, could positively contribute to a systems-level change for immigrant and racialized workers in Canada.

Appendix

A1. Initial Demographic Survey Questions

1. Name
2. City (open-ended question)
3. Age group
   a. 25-30
   b. 31-34
   c. 35-44
   d. 45-54
   e. 55-64
   f. 65+
4. Gender identity
   a. Cisgender woman
   b. Transgender woman
   c. Cisgender man
   d. Transgender man
   e. Questioning
   f. Other: _____
5. Racial identity/ethnicity
   a. Black/African (Kenyan, Nigerian, Somalis, etc.)
   b. Black/Caribbean (Jamaican, Trinidadian and Tobagonian, Haitian, etc.)
   c. East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.)
   d. Latin American (Colombian, Ecuadoriana, Mexican, etc.)
   e. South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, etc.)
   f. Southeast Asian (Cambodian, Vietnamese, Philippines, etc.)
   g. Southwest Asian and Middle East (Egyptian, Syrian, Iranian, etc.)
   h. White/European (English, Irish, Italian, Polish, etc.)
   i. Other: _____
6. Languages (spoken & written): (open-ended question)

7. Marital status:
   a. Single
   b. Married
   c. Common-law
   d. Widowed
   e. Separated
   f. Divorced
   g. Other: _____

8. Number of dependents:

(A dependent is a person that relies on you for financial support. If applicable to you, please include children, parents, or family members that are dependents. If you do not have any dependents, please write "0".)

9. Years in Canada
   a. 0-3 years
   b. 4-6 years
   c. 7-9 years
   d. 10 or more
   e. Born in Canada

10. Level of education
    a. University (including masters)
    b. College degree or certificate
    c. Some university credits
    d. Post-graduate degree (PhD or equivalent)
    e. High school graduation
    f. Trade and apprentice
    g. Some primary and/or secondary education
    h. None of the above
    i. Other: _____

11. Employment status
    a. Full time permanent
    b. Part time permanent
    c. Full time contract
    d. Part time contract
    e. Student (full time or part time program)
    f. Not employed / looking for work
    g. Not employed / not looking for work
    h. Other / started my own company or nonprofit organization
    i. Retired

12. Occupation
    a. Community and social services
    b. Education, training, library
    c. Business and finance
    d. Management, consulting
    e. Healthcare support
    f. Office and administrative support
    g. Arts, design
    h. Entertainment, media
    i. Sports
    j. Architecture and engineering
    k. Law and legal services
    l. Computer or mathematician

m. Personal support services
n. Construction or trade
o. Food service industry
p. Healthcare practitioners
q. Life, physical or social sciences
r. Retail and sales
s. Other: _____

13. Select which $50 e-gift card do you want:
    a. Amazon
    b. Starbucks
    c. UberEats
    d. DoorDash
    e. Apple
    f. Google Play
    g. Uber
    h. Sephora

A2. Women Focus Group Questions

1. Raise your hands if you have been in Canada for less than ten (10) years.
2. Did you arrive in Canada before or during the pandemic?
3. Are you currently working in a job that matches your education or previous career, either from your home country or what you studied in Canada?
4. Did you change your career or job because of the employment barriers you faced in Canada?
5. How important is having adequate wages/pay when applying for a job or accepting a job offer?
6. Do you believe that your wages/pay matches your skills and background?
7. What has been your experience in the workplace in Canada, such as interactions with your coworkers, supervisors and clients/customers?
8. Have you experienced any form of discrimination in the workplace? (Such as racial discrimination, exclusion or isolation by coworkers, being asked to change how you dress for religious/cultural reasons etc.)
9. Have you experienced macroaggression in the workplace? (Such as being constantly interrupted, consistently having your name mispronounced/forgotten, etc.)
10. Regarding job search support, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with the following statement: "I know where to go to get support when looking for a job."
11. What did you study before arriving in Canada?
12. Where did you immigrate? What was your professional background before immigrating to Canada? What is your professional background in Canada?
13. What has been your experience when applying for jobs? If negative, what kind of challenges or difficulties have you faced?

14. What has been your experience when attending interviews in Canada? (Positive, negative or mixed)? If negative, what kind of challenges or difficulties have you faced?

15. What do you consider when accepting a job offer?

16. Share some of your experiences in the Canadian workplace, such as interactions with your coworkers, supervisors and clients/customers?

17. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your career– whether looking for a job, retaining your job or advancing in your career?

18. What resources or support have you received when looking for a job, who provided the support, what went well and what could be improved upon? If you had to advise an employer on how to increase diverse employees in their workplace, what would you tell them? (consider: recruitment process, work culture, retention and opportunities for career growth)

A3. Youth Focus Group Questions

1. Raise your hands if you have been in Canada less than five (5) years.

2. If you are an immigrant or international student, did you arrive in Canada before or during the pandemic?

3. Are you currently working in a job that matches your education/area of study (including summer jobs, internships, co-op, and apprenticeships)?

4. Do you believe you may have to work in a job that is outside of your interest areas because of the employment barriers you face in Canada?

5. Participants were asked to indicate to what extent they agree with the following statement: "I am more likely to accept a job if the organization's values align with my own."

6. How important is having adequate wages/pay when applying for or accepting a job offer?

7. Do you believe that your wages/pay matches your skills and background?

8. What has been your experience in the workplace in Canada, such as interactions with your coworkers, supervisors and clients/customers?

9. Have you experienced any form of discrimination in the workplace? (Such as racial discrimination, exclusion or isolation by coworkers, being asked to change how you dress for religious/cultural reasons etc.)

10. Have you experienced macroaggressions in the workplace? (Such as racial discrimination, exclusion or isolation by coworkers, being asked to change how you dress for religious/cultural reasons, etc.).

11. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with the following statement: "I know where to go to get support when looking for a job.

12. What did you take or hope to study in trade school, college, or university?

13. Where did you immigrate? What is your current work or volunteer experience (including internships or co-ops)? What is your dream profession or career?

14. What has been your experience when applying for jobs or attending interviews for employment/volunteer positions? If negative, what kind of challenges or difficulties have you faced?
15. What do you consider when accepting a job offer?
16. Share some of your experiences in Canadian workplaces, such as interactions with your coworkers, supervisors and clients/customers
17. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your career– whether looking for a job, going back to school, advancing in your career, changing educational or career paths, etc.?
18. What resources or support have you received when looking for a job, who provided the support, what went well and what could be improved upon? If you had to advise an employer on how to increase diverse young workers as employees, what would you tell them? (Consider recruitment process, work culture, Retention and opportunities for career growth, etc.)