

IMPAKT  
FOUNDATION  
FOR  
SOCIAL  
CHANGE



# Redefining Inclusion

Prioritizing Newcomer Employment in Canada

## Letter from the Executive Director, Martina Ambiri

Impakt Foundation emerged from the Tailor Project, an innovative initiative of the Canadian apparel industry that brought 2,500 Holocaust survivors and refugees to Canada between 1948 and 1949. The Foundation recognized the need to build on the principle that was central to the success of the Tailor Project, and which remains key to transforming the lives of marginalized populations-employment. The mission is to create pathways to employment for newcomers to Canada, because we believe that employment drives meaningful social change. We know that establishing a network for training and employing Canada's newcomers has the power to transform lives and enrich our communities, and we hope to be at the forefront of that change.

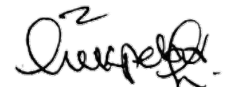
We envision an environment where newcomers no longer face barriers to employment and have equal opportunities for economic success. Currently, we are doing this by helping employers meet hiring needs with access to qualified, pre-screened newcomers who are motivated to work, so that together we can enable business and communities in the Greater Toronto Area to thrive.

As a newcomer myself, I faced many challenges when first arriving in Canada such as being confronted with a “fear of the unknown” in a new country. I experienced several cultural shocks and frustrations while trying to integrate and find employment. Even with my MBA coupled with years of experience in market research, leadership, and program management, I struggled to secure meaningful employment that aligned with my passions, skills, and qualifications. For some employers, I was “overqualified”, to some

I had no “Canadian experience”, and many others never replied to my inquiries at all. That was until I was given this opportunity at Impakt Foundation to maximize my skills and apply my professional experience within my current role. All newcomers deserve an opportunity to showcase their skills, find their passion, and further the economic and social growth of their communities.

To further understand why marginalized populations continue to face barriers to employment, Impakt Foundation has embarked on this research project which will aid us in the development of evidence-based programs, and enrich our story telling to elucidate the ongoing challenges newcomers continue to face. We hope that employers will continue to be even more inclusive in their hiring process and collaborate to create more equitable and meaningful employment opportunities for newcomers.

Let's walk the walk and make hiring newcomers a priority!



Martina Ambiri

## Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to all those who contributed their time, insights, and experiences to the writing of this report, through interviews and engagement. The input of interview participants was vital in ensuring the depth and validity of the report.

Special thanks also to our researchers and writers, Maya Stevens-Uninsky, Cosmina-Silvia Nistor, Matson Kitamisi, Hazar Najjar, Josh Klein, and Tuba Tinat, without whom this report could not have been completed. Finally, we would like to thank the Executive Director, Martina Ambiri, and the Board of Directors, who have provided direction and support throughout this process.



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# Executive Summary

## The Context for Change

Immigration is a crucial element of the Canadian employment landscape, making up 100% of labour market growth.<sup>i</sup> Ontario welcomes almost half of all newcomers to Canada,<sup>ii</sup> and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in particular has a population that is almost 50% foreign-born.<sup>iii,iv</sup> Over 35% of these newcomers have at least a bachelor's degree,<sup>v</sup> and more than half of them are between the ages of 25 and 40.<sup>vi</sup> Canada relies upon these young, educated, and highly employable newcomers for its economic growth, stability, and flexibility within a changing labour market.

Despite this, newcomers to Canada, and within the GTA specifically, face significant barriers in finding equitable and dignified employment. Newcomers, in particular refugees, have higher rates of unemployment,<sup>vii</sup> earn on average 10% less than Canadian-born individuals, and are chronically under-employed in relation to education and skill levels.<sup>viii</sup> The under- and unemployment of newcomers in Canada has a negative economic impact of an estimated \$50 billion annually,<sup>viii</sup> not to mention the impact on human potential, mental health, and social inclusion.<sup>ix</sup>

This report seeks to identify the social, economic, and systemic barriers to equitable employment for newcomers to Canada, specifically in the GTA. Through this research, recommendations have been developed on how to remove barriers to relevant, sustainable, equitable, and gainful employment, and support newcomers in reaching their full potential.

## Key Findings

Over the course of this research, a wide variety of stakeholders, including newcomers, service providers, government agencies, researchers, and employers were engaged to identify critical themes, provide lived experience, and elaborate on the existing literature. This work resulted in the identification of barriers faced by newcomers at a variety of systemic levels.

At the individual level, newcomers face significant pressure to surmount barriers through personal integration, rather than through the implementation of inclusive and open hiring practices. Barriers identified include credential accreditation and skill recognition, as well as discrimination. This leads to precarious work environments, and a high uptake of low-paying survival jobs. At the service provision level, newcomers faced geographic and transportation barriers in accessing services, systemic barriers in the structure of service provision, and fractured resources. Some barriers around gender and need-specific service provision added an intersectional challenge to vulnerable newcomers. Finally, at the employer level, misconceptions around legal hiring of newcomers, newcomer ability level, and understanding of Canadian work culture and experience were common barriers, as was the lack of local employment and social networks connecting newcomers with local employment networks.



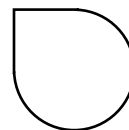


## Recommendations for Future Efforts

The recommendations provided in this document are the first steps towards improved access to critical employment services, financial independence for newcomers, and sustainable economic growth in Canada. They describe an approach towards the development of a more inclusive society that allows newcomers to access equitable, appropriate, and dignified employment. We look forward to a time when all newcomers living in Canada have 'equal treatment with respect to employment'.<sup>x</sup>

These inter- and intra-sectoral recommendations focus on the areas where greatest impact can be made in the sector of newcomer employment, namely Collaboration; Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; Standards for Success; and Tailored Support Services. Readers and stakeholders across the spectrum of the settlement sector will have the opportunity to customize and amplify these recommendations to improve the experiences of newcomers and benefit the Canadian labour market.

Impakt Foundation has also committed to using these recommendations to ensure that the scope and direction of our work will be appropriate, necessary, and impactful, to the communities we serve. Through expanding our networks of partners, collaborators, and service providers, developing new programming rooted in a trauma-informed, justice-based approach, setting clear targets and goals for our work and for our partners, and providing a person-to-person approach to those we serve, we hope to put in motion the change we want to see in Canada.



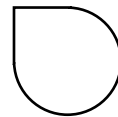
# Methodology

After numerous conversations within Impakt Foundation and the clients we serve, the decision was taken to conduct in-depth research around employment for newcomers. The specific question the research team was looking to answer was “What are the barriers to employment for newcomers to Canada, specifically in the Greater Toronto Area?” The answers to this question will inform the scope of work done by the Impakt Foundation internally, as well as provide recommendations for external stakeholders in hopes to make improvements for newcomers trying to secure meaningful employment.

The research team conducted secondary research from February 2022 to June 2022 looking at both qualitative and quantitative data around newcomer employment, focused within Ontario and the GTA. From June to August 2022, primary research was conducted through one-on-one interviews with researchers (2), employers (5), newcomers (5), employment service providers (8), and government agencies (3). All 23 interviews were confidential and

anonymous, 30-60 minute sessions regarding their experiences and understanding of the sector, to help develop the themes and findings of the research. The sample size was quite small, but provided themes to guide the extensive secondary data, which was the bulk of the research project. The interviewees’ input and perspectives have been invaluable in validating and directing the research.

The resulting findings are laid out in this report. Using the key themes identified as barriers to employment for newcomers, as well as input from interviewees, Impakt Foundation developed a series of evidence-based recommendations that, if undertaken, would serve to reduce or remove these barriers, and create greater opportunity for equitable and appropriate employment for newcomers.







# Introduction

Despite a fraught history of immigration, resettlement, and the use of indigenous lands, Canada prides itself on being a multicultural and welcoming nation. Even with such a diverse population, newcomers face challenges that differ from those born in Canada. **It is imperative we recognize the important role newcomers play in Canada's economic, social, and cultural growth.** There is a richness in pluralism- this report seeks to emphasize that the equitable inclusion of newcomers into the Canadian workforce is the responsibility of Canadians, government, newcomers, and employers alike as we all stand to benefit from newcomers' employment. Many newcomers feel disillusioned after seeing the difficulties of integrating within the Canadian labour market,<sup>1</sup> which is why inclusion, instead of integration, must be the goal where both parties share the responsibility of newcomers' employment journey.

This report focuses on the importance of and need for the equitable employment of newcomers in Canada, in particular within the GTA. Throughout the report the importance of newcomer employment in Canada is recognized, not exclusively for the benefit that it will bring to the local and national economy and sustained social services,<sup>2</sup> but rather with the aim of improving the quality of life for newcomers to this nation. The report's recommendations focus on reducing barriers to employment, improving the navigability of the employment sector, recognizing the skills and individual human value of newcomers, and ensuring that all newcomers are supported in reaching their full potential. The research and recommendations also identify guidelines for the Impakt Foundation to further hone its work towards the spaces where it may be of greatest benefit to the communities it serves. Through these recommendations, and the related actions by the Foundation, we hope to promote improved access to critical services, financial independence for newcomers, and sustainable economic growth.



## Newcomers in Canada

Newcomers are landed immigrants who came to Canada in the five years previous to the given year.<sup>1,3</sup> A landed immigrant is a person who has the ability to live permanently in Canada.<sup>4</sup> This definition of newcomer is inclusive of immigrants, or individuals who choose to move to Canada, and refugees, who are claiming a protective status. Refugees in Canada are displaced persons with a certain class of refugee status who have been matched with a public or private sponsor, and upon arrival in Canada receive permanent residency.

Other groups of immigrants not included in the common definition of newcomers are referenced in this report on occasion. This includes asylum seekers, or individuals whose refugee status has not been confirmed, but who come to Canada seeking protection, but are not guaranteed refugee or permanent status, or access to full resettlement services.<sup>5</sup> Also not included in the definition of

newcomer are those with study permits, or open work permits. Finally, it is important to mention irregular border crossers. Statistics referring to newcomers overlook many of these populations, who still require resources and intervention. This research seeks to examine all areas of need, and where relevant will identify these populations and their priorities.

The last Canadian census showed that **the nation welcomed over a million newcomers to Canada in the 5 year period** between 2011 and 2016.<sup>6</sup> Immigration continues to be a critical element of the Canadian employment landscape, making up almost 100% of labour force growth.<sup>7</sup> It is evident that Canada is reliant on the regular influx of young, educated, and highly employable newcomers to support its economic growth, stability, and changing labour market. Despite this, there are inequities in service access, employment opportunity, and income within these communities that must be addressed.

NB: Census data from 2016 (commonly referred to in this report as the most recent Canadian census from 2021 has not yet released data on newcomers) will refer to newcomers as those who entered Canada between 2011-2016. Other data from other sources indicate newcomers as the 5 years before publication of that source.

## Newcomers in the Greater Toronto Area

Toronto is home to 35.9% of Canada's immigrant population, consisting of 2,705,550 foreign-born individuals (as of the 2016 census), and 30% of all newcomers.<sup>8</sup> This is the largest group of newcomers in one metropolitan area in all of Canada, representing diverse ethnicities and cultures, and contributing to the diasporic nature of Canada's most populous city.<sup>9</sup> Over 35% of these newcomers have at least a bachelor's degree, and more than half of them are between the ages of 25 and 40.<sup>10</sup> The nation relies upon these young, educated, and highly employable newcomers for its economic growth, stability, and flexibility within a changing labour market.

Newcomers in Toronto face barriers to equitable employment and a high quality of life. Relevant and stable employment remains a commodity which makes accessing other necessities such as housing and food security challenging, while simultaneously dealing with immigration issues, discrimination, and struggling to access government assistance.<sup>11</sup> Other challenges in Toronto

include accessing appropriate documentation. Proof of immigration status and documents such as a Permanent Resident Document or a health card are required for most city services, including basic needs allowance and childcare, to housing and tax licences.<sup>12</sup> In response to this, the City of Toronto has produced the Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026, which commits the city to improving newcomer access to services and employment, and the province of Ontario has introduced several pieces of legislation targeted at removing barriers to newcomer employment.<sup>13</sup>

While the city and province have committed to reducing and eventually removing barriers to equitable employment for newcomers, there remains much work still to be done. The majority of people in Toronto were not born in Canada, and future projections indicate that the vast majority of newcomers to Canada will continue to live in the city, making this an important location to focus resources and work that benefits newcomers and their employment.<sup>14</sup> The demand for improved services in employment will only continue to grow.

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**“The nation relies upon these young, educated, and highly employable newcomers for its economic growth, stability, and flexibility within a changing labour market.”**

## The Impact of COVID-19 on Employment

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment in both Canadian-born and newcomer populations increased by 13.5%.<sup>15</sup> However, by the end of 2020, Canadian-born unemployment rates had reverted to pre-pandemic numbers, while newcomer unemployment remained high.<sup>16</sup> In 2021, 9.8% of newcomers were unemployed, compared to 7% of Canadian-born individuals. Previous data had shown that the longer an immigrant lived in Canada, the lower their unemployment rate would be,<sup>15</sup> however, these current trends are likely to undo decades of work to close the economic gap between newcomers and Canadian-born individuals. This may be offset by improving the capacity for newcomers to join the labour market by reducing the barriers they face in doing so.<sup>17</sup>

The impact of COVID-19 continues to be uneven among Canadians beyond unemployment. Despite newcomers **making up 25% of the population of Ontario, they accounted for over 43% of COVID-19 cases provincially.**<sup>18</sup> Immigrants are over-represented in jobs that have a high rate of exposure to COVID-19, such as front-line or essential workers, or work in jobs that were affected in stability or income by the pandemic, such as the service industry. This remains a harsh reminder that statistics reflecting decreasing unemployment do not indicate work stability or reliability of income flow.<sup>17</sup>

“The impact of COVID-19 continues to be uneven among Canadians beyond unemployment.”





## Ongoing Worker Shortage in Canada and the Impact on Newcomers

Canada, and more specifically Ontario, is dealing with an ongoing worker shortage. As birth rates continue to decline, and the general population ages into retirement,<sup>19</sup> challenges arise around ensuring knowledge transfer, and finding experienced employees to fill these new gaps.<sup>20</sup> Certain sectors, particularly trades, will lose a significant amount of workers due to retirement. In addition, many young people are leaving urban centres due to the increasing cost of living.

Newcomers continue to enter Canada as a vital part of our economic and social landscape at greater rates every year. However, despite being highly educated, and necessary to labour market growth, they experience greater rates of unemployment than those born in Canada- a gap only exacerbated through the COVID-19 pandemic. This gap is even greater amongst refugees, who have an unemployment rate almost double that of other immigrant groups.<sup>21</sup> **The under- and un-employment of newcomers in Canada has a negative economic impact of an estimated \$50 billion annually.** This report will explore some of the key barriers that newcomers face in finding equitable and appropriate employment, examine existing newcomer employment services, and look into challenges that may prevent employers from easily hiring newcomers. Supplemented with the knowledge of those with lived experience and insights into best-practice, this report will provide recommendations on how to remove barriers to relevant, sustainable, equitable, and gainful employment, and support newcomers in reaching their full potential.



# Barriers to Employment for Newcomers

## Canadian Requirements for Employment

### The Accreditation Process

The majority of newcomers to Canada have at least an undergraduate degree,<sup>22</sup> although this does not necessarily translate to an increase of income or job security. Employers may be unfamiliar with the names of international institutions and overlook these qualifications.<sup>23</sup> For most employment, foreign academic credentials need to be translated and transferred to the Canadian equivalence in order to be recognized by Canadian standards. **The lack of uniformity across educational systems means comparing foreign degrees and work experience to Canadian education and experience is challenging.** Although there are mechanisms, such as World Education Service, to accredit foreign education and experience, these services are hard to find, expensive, and time consuming. They also require significant documentation that may be challenging to find for some newcomers.<sup>24</sup> Newcomers interviewed for this report indicated that the time, resources, and documentation required for accreditation were overwhelming or sometimes unavailable, and lack of employer knowledge of their graduating institutions was disheartening.

Some educational accreditations do not translate directly into the Canadian context and require additional courses and exams in order to be accepted by Canadian employers.<sup>25</sup> Still other regulated occupations require mandatory Canadian credentials such as a licence, certificate, or registration with a Canadian-recognized regulatory body.<sup>26</sup> While Ontario has passed legislation to remove regulations around some professions, this still remains a major barrier to employment.<sup>13</sup> Without Canadian equivalency and accreditation, it is harder for newcomers to find employment, even those with significant relevant experience and education.

This barrier to the job market is most acutely felt among refugees who were forced to flee and experienced long periods of unemployment during relocation as well as being unable to secure or retrieve official documentation for academic accomplishments.<sup>21</sup> This leaves them unable to meet requirements for equivalency or accreditation once in Canada. As a consequence, they may have to resort to unskilled jobs in sectors they were not trained in - otherwise known as survival jobs.

### “Skilled” & “Unskilled” Labour, and Survival Jobs

Lack of recognition around skills, experience, and education, often influence a newcomer’s ability to obtain “skilled” versus “unskilled” jobs. In Canada, skill level is officially designated using the National Occupational Classification (NOC) system. This system is broken down into four tiers of skill type, within which there are skill levels. The top two tiers representing “skilled” labour typically require a university or college education, including specialized training or apprenticeships, and are eligible for express entry or federal skilled worker entry to Canada. The third level is defined as “semi-skilled”, and the fourth as “unskilled”, meaning a lower education level is required, or on-site work is offered for skill building.<sup>27</sup> The work included in this lower tier is often trade based work, manufacturing, or sales, jobs on which the Canadian economy is highly dependent upon. Nonetheless, Ontario (and Canada in general) continues to prioritize pathways for “skilled” immigrants over others.<sup>28</sup>

However, “skill” level is discussed in a variety of ways beyond NOC level. Often, “unskilled” is associated with a lower educational attainment, abilities, and low economic value, and frequently used as a derogatory statement. The idea is common that those undertaking “unskilled” work must improve their skills and capacity

in order to leave a job for better opportunities; regardless of the fact that this work can be both fulfilling and a critical part of a successful economy. In reality, there is a depth of knowledge and skill associated with “unskilled” work that is under-appreciated both in perception and in financial compensation. Particularly for newcomers, these socially constructed biases can be harmful to mental health and economic well being, and the NOC level under which they entered Canada may prove to be a barrier to equitable and appropriate employment.

Despite the high average education level of new Canadians, at the last census 35% of newcomers were over-educated for the jobs they currently held, a number which continues to grow.<sup>10</sup> Many newcomers in this position typically hold survival jobs, or work not related to their chosen profession, but necessary for subsistence. Survival jobs are often more precarious than other employment opportunities, meaning that the employment is insecure and more vulnerable to income inadequacy.<sup>29</sup> Particularly for highly educated newcomers, **this precarious work represents lost productivity and a poor use of skills and experience, and can negatively influence mental health.**<sup>10</sup>

Survival jobs may be vital for newcomers in ensuring they gain Canadian experience, initial income, networking, and other benefits such as English language learning and practice, or engagement with Canadian work culture.<sup>13</sup> However, survival jobs can be poorly remunerated, and involve exhausting labour that limits time spent job searching, building a community, and accessing services. The newcomers interviewed for this report spoke about holding survival jobs that were physically laborious and exhausting. They spoke about how they and their colleagues in these jobs felt their employment was extremely precarious, and that they could be

laid-off without any warning. These opportunities can generate frustration and impatience with delayed career growth, build financial stress, affect mental health, create a sense of being undervalued and dissatisfied with life in Canada,<sup>24</sup> and may look like a transition out of a professional field on resumes.<sup>30</sup> It is critical that we match newcomers to jobs they want or support them in finding a pathway to employment, rather than emphasizing survival work.

**“Unskilled” workers are essential workers, and the demand for them is constantly increasing.**<sup>31</sup> A priority in creating a strong labour market, without undervaluing individual skills, will be to continue reducing barriers to “unskilled” labour migration as permanent residents.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the perspectives on skill levels of labour must be adjusted to recognize the skills that these jobs require, not only through shifting the language, but also through making them economically viable and fulfilling employment opportunities.

## Employment Rights

Newcomers often face issues with the stability and safety of their labour, reporting unsafe working conditions, unregulated wages, or unfair dismissal.<sup>11</sup> **First jobs for newcomers to Ontario are usually precarious and have poor working conditions.**<sup>32</sup> Exploitation is common for newcomers who are in desperate need of the income. With little knowledge about employment rights, newcomers may not know what resources are available to them if they are experiencing mistreatment or exploitation,<sup>32</sup> and are often hesitant in voicing their health and safety concerns at the workplace.<sup>21</sup>





Employment that does not have rigorous requirements for credentials, language proficiency, or Canadian work experience is often found in the informal economy. Informal sector employment includes work that is not registered with fiscal or social authorities, and avoids legal or professional requirements by operating in cash or through informal channels, without purview from the government in regulation or taxation.<sup>33</sup> Working in the informal economy is particularly common for newcomers with restricted work permits and those who can not keep up with the exponential living costs in Canada. This work places newcomers in a vulnerable situation where the employer can use blackmail or threats in order to refuse pay, cut hours, harass workers or otherwise take advantage. Newcomers and refugees are more hesitant to report employers as they would be admitting to working illegally, which would negatively impact their application process or threaten their status in Canada.

Non-standard labour, such as contract work or “gig work”, is becoming a larger part of the Canadian economy. Temporary jobs increased at a rate five times faster than permanent jobs from 2008 to 2018, leaving workers considerably more vulnerable.<sup>34</sup> In addition to the numerous barriers to employment, unregulated, unionized, and non-standard work is a common entry point for the Canadian labour market for newcomers, even though unstable and precarious.<sup>29</sup> **Vulnerable workers, often newcomers, take on precarious employment, which typically have little to no financial security and a lower salary.**<sup>35</sup> These jobs place newcomers at risk of employment insecurity, income inadequacy, and a lack of rights and protection.<sup>29</sup> The lack of rights (including lack of benefits) that accompany these jobs leaves newcomers highly vulnerable if they get laid-off or there are any violations committed against workers.

## Racism, Xenophobia, and Discrimination

### Demographic Characteristics

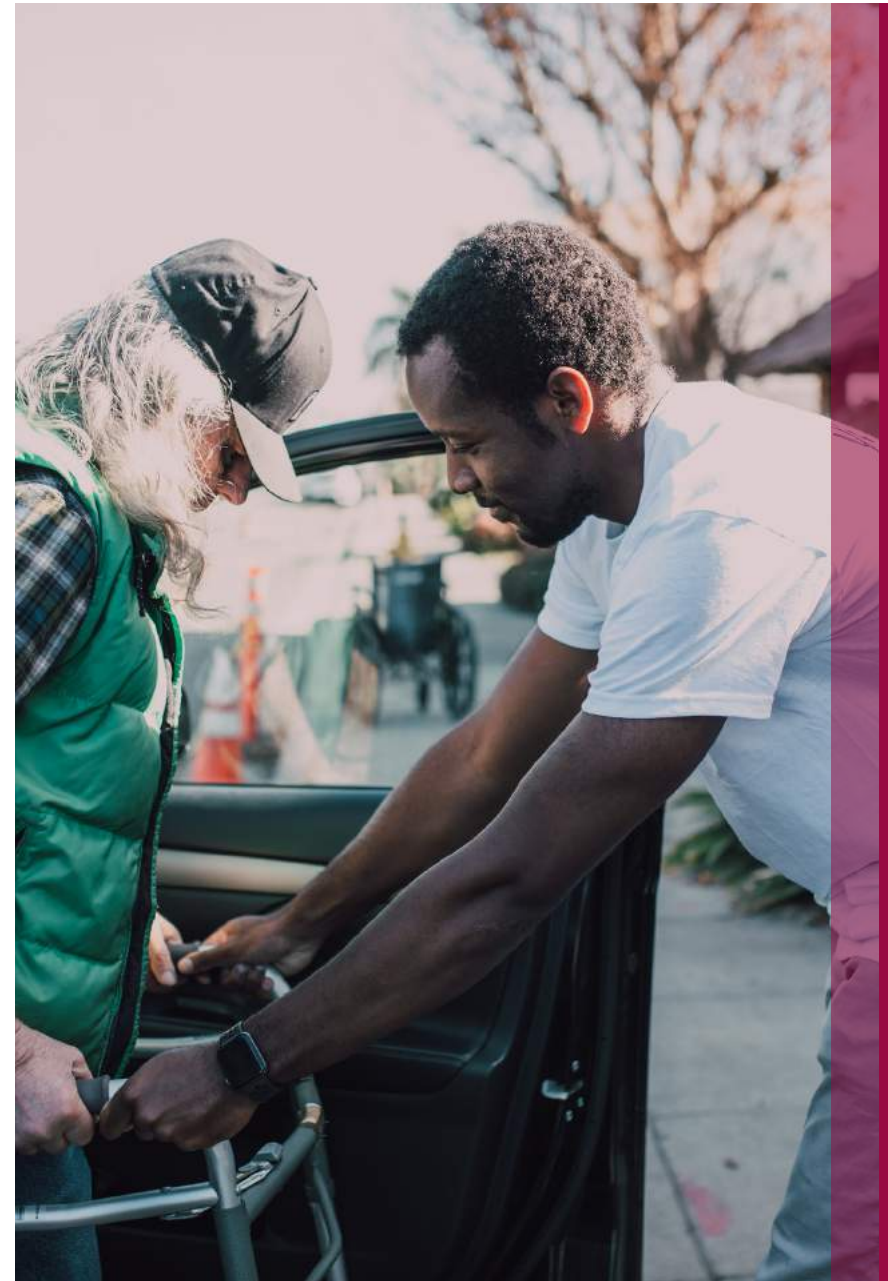
In Canada, racialized individuals make up about 22% of Canada's labour force. While data is currently collected separately for racialized individuals and newcomers to Canada, there is a significant overlap between these categories.<sup>36</sup> It is difficult to know what proportion of newcomers to Canada are racialized, but data, such as the fact that racialized populations make up over 60% of first generation Canadians,<sup>36</sup> suggests it is an overwhelming majority. Racialized populations in Canada experience higher rates of unemployment,<sup>37</sup> financial stress, income inequality,<sup>38</sup> and are more likely to be employed in low-wage jobs than non-racialized, Canadian-born communities. Racialized newcomer women in particular have the greatest likelihood of being unemployed, and if employed, having a lower than average income.<sup>33</sup> In situations where families struggle to find employment and childcare simultaneously, women are more likely to stay home with children while partners work for Canadian experience or gain additional credentials.

Newcomers also face employment discrimination based on preconceptions around their capabilities. Specifically the assumption on the part of employers of inadequate English language skills based on “foreign” names, or a refusal to hire individuals with accented English.<sup>39</sup> Employers may use language skills as a strategy for discrimination in hiring practices that primarily targets immigrants and newcomers. Newcomers interviewed for this research felt that they were “pre-screened” based on their names, and some employers identified the potential

of limited English language skills as a barrier to hiring. The othering of newcomers based on accents, and a rhetoric around “fixing” the way they speak reinforces dangerous stereotypes around capacity and intelligence, and focuses the problem with the newcomers, rather than on adjusting hiring practices.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, perceptions of foreign experience being inferior to experience in Canada are elements of discrimination from employers, and are often a thinly veiled representation of xenophobia in hiring practices.<sup>24</sup> The requirement of Canadian experience is in and of itself identified as discriminatory by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, as it has the capacity to inherently target newcomers to the province, unless employers can identify a specific reason why Canadian experience may be expressly necessary.<sup>43</sup> However the challenges of enforcing this recommendation has not resulted in any great change.

It is clear that discrimination based on race, gender, language, religion, culture, and immigration status, continues to affect employment, hiring, and earning power. Overall, newcomers are more likely to suffer the effects of economic depression and unemployment to a greater degree than Canadian-born individuals. Whether it is being paid less, scheduled for fewer hours, or spoken to disrespectfully, discrimination can have real impacts on mental health employment opportunity, and job performance of newcomers.<sup>24</sup>

“The othering of newcomers based on accents, and a rhetoric around “fixing” the way they speak reinforces dangerous stereotypes around capacity and intelligence, and focuses the problem with the newcomers, rather than on adjusting hiring practices.”



## Financial Outcomes

A significant barrier to the equitable employment of newcomers, is the discrimination they face in achieving equal financial outcomes. **Immigrants and newcomers in Canada earn on average 10% less than Canadian-born individuals, even when gender, age, and location are accounted for.** Even though newcomers to Canada have a higher overall educational attainment, the gap in earnings continues to grow. In large part this is due to under-employment, which accounts for an estimated 40% of this wage gap.<sup>41</sup> If national policy and employers prioritize the closing of the labour gap, allowing newcomers to reach their full economic potential, there is a possibility to add billions of dollars a year to the national economy.<sup>41</sup> Discrimination against newcomers in employment and earnings continues to cost Canada, in more ways than one. By reducing discrimination, and barriers to equitable employment such as Canadian experience, we can continue to enhance the dignity of life, the reach of human potential, and the well-being of all Canadians.

## Integration Versus Inclusion

Despite integration being a community function, the responsibility largely falls on newcomers to adapt to Canadian work cultures and social norms.<sup>42</sup> The stress of the integration process can have serious mental health implications, and can negatively impact newcomer ability to secure employment, particularly for refugees who have pre-migration trauma.<sup>42</sup> As newcomers try to embody Canadian society, language, and norms through external pressures such as discrimination, they must also navigate their “culture shock” with limited support systems while attempting to secure decent employment, which can have a detrimental

impact on mental health.<sup>30</sup> Integration inherently places the responsibility on immigrants to change and adapt to the Canadian standard, laying the blame on them when they do not integrate or successfully navigate the Canadian legal system and customs to the expected degree.<sup>43</sup> The present-day immigration policy strives for ideal labour market outcomes, through the immigration point system, concluding that poor labour market outcomes must be caused by individual deficits. However, research shows that even carefully selected newcomers face employment challenges due to persistent racial discrimination and other systemic challenges.<sup>1</sup>

Inclusion should be prioritized over integration when supporting newcomers. In an inclusion-based process, both sides adapt and share the burden of the challenges of living and working in a new country, providing newcomers with support and dignity as they enter Canada. **Through inclusive processes, the diversity of newcomers will be acknowledged, valued, and incorporated into the standard.** If the burden of securing employment, obtaining legal documents, and manoeuvring through the bureaucratic system is solely on newcomers, it highlights that Canada is unable to rectify its systemic barriers and is an unjust country to live in for those looking for a better life. As a nation state of newcomers, that is reliant on newcomers’ economic and cultural value, Canada must change its immigration language and policies to prioritize inclusion, allowing newcomers to succeed in their new home.

“If national policy and employers prioritize the closing of the labour gap, allowing newcomers to reach their full economic potential, there is a possibility to add billions of dollars a year to the national economy.”



# Employment Services for Newcomers

Settlement services in Canada are a spectrum of free services designed to help newcomers to adjust to life in Canada. Settlement services include pre-arrival services for those who have yet to arrive to Canada<sup>44</sup> and services from arrival onwards which include resources such as employment assistance, language assessment, language classes, housing assistance, or enrolling children in school.<sup>45</sup>

Employment services for newcomers are one of the most important tools to help newcomers settle successfully in Canada, but remain under-funded and under-prioritized.<sup>46</sup> Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is the largest funder of settlement services, yet only 8% of its annual budget is allocated to employment services.<sup>47</sup> **Only 32% of Canada's 1,200 settlement agencies are dedicated to employment-related services.**<sup>21</sup> Each province in Canada offers a different suite of services, but this review focuses on Ontario.

Settlement services are provided by settlement and employment agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), school boards, provincial governments, and municipal governments, while the federal government provides indirect services by contracting out services to third-parties.<sup>47</sup> A brief overview of the services provided by each sector is available below.

# Service Delivery Organizations

## Civil Society Organizations

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are non-governmental, non-profit organizations based within the community. CSOs provide the majority of settlement services in Canada. The current Canadian settlement model prioritizes non-governmental service provider organizations as the main point of service delivery, with programs primarily funded by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).<sup>48</sup> The CSOs providing settlement services often provide a more nuanced approach to service delivery than governmental (provincial) settlement services since they work closely with communities and understand their cultural contexts.<sup>48</sup>

**COSTI Immigrant Services** provides support for settlement, language training, employment, and skill building. 44% of 2021 spending was dedicated to employment services. COSTI provides support in 60 languages while in 2021 over 39,000 individuals received assistance.<sup>49</sup> It's funded by all three tiers of government as well as various foundations, Employment Ontario, and Toronto Catholic District School Board.

## School Boards

Local school boards are made up of community members, and govern certain elements of the education system. They also provide settlement services in Canada, usually in language learning as well as the integration of students into the education

system. School boards can be funders of settlement services but also provide settlement services geared towards employment for youth, adults, seniors and those with disabilities.

**Toronto District School Board (TDSB)** supports newcomers with settlement services that include career information, job search help (resume writing and interview preparation), mentorship, workers' rights, and skills upgrading workshops, while providing free on-site childcare services.



## Federal Government Services

Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is the federal government branch funding settlement service provider organizations. There are six main areas of settlement services and support: Needs Assessments and Referrals, Information and Orientation, Language Assessments, Language Training, Employment-Related Services and Community Connections.<sup>50</sup> IRCC-funded Employment-Related Services consists of both short and long-term services: work placements, mentorship, licensure/certification preparation, networking opportunities, job search skills and matching services, and employment counselling.

**Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)** runs a job bank as a starting place to connect newcomers with employers. The site also guides newcomers through the process of applying for a social insurance number (SIN), verifying credentials, where to find information on taxes and benefits, language assessments, and training, among other resources available.

## Provincial Government Services

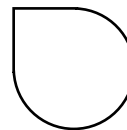
The Ontario government both funds and provides settlement services. Funding for newcomer employment programs is provided through the Trillium Foundation. The province offers “Global Experience Ontario”, an information and referral centre around regulated professions,<sup>51</sup> and the “Ontario Bridge Training Program” to “bridge” international training.<sup>52</sup> The government also offers a list of settlement agencies and job searches in different domains, and apprenticeship opportunities on their website.<sup>53</sup>

**Employment Ontario offers the Ontario Bridge Training Program**, to help newcomers or immigrants find employment in their field of training without having to duplicate existing training. Scholarships and bursary options are available to eligible applicants.

## Municipal Government Services

The municipal government of Toronto also funds and provides employment services for newcomers through specific kiosks throughout Toronto, as well as through the Employment and Social Services department.<sup>54</sup> The City of Toronto has produced the Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026, which focuses on improving newcomer access to the city. The City also provides funding to NGOs providing employment services.

**Newcomer Service Kiosks** allow newcomers to meet with a settlement worker to find more accessible information about services and supports available within the city, and the requirements they will need to meet to access them.



# Barriers to Accessing Employment Services

Despite the diverse sources of free newcomer employment services, accessibility continues to be a significant barrier. A diverse array of social, physical, and cultural barriers continue to prevent newcomers from accessing equitable support. These barriers are discussed below.

## Location & Transportation

Transportation and location are barriers to accessing employment services and employment opportunities. Many newcomers experience transport poverty, which is a combination of limited access to transport, such as no reliable car or inaccessible public transit, and other socio-demographic disadvantages, such as low income, or unemployment.<sup>55</sup> Lack of accessible, reliable, and affordable transportation can have a negative impact on wellbeing, and limit willingness and ability to access employment services, or ability to reliably attend any work that is found.<sup>56</sup>

More newcomers are settling in suburban areas, however employment services are still primarily based in urban centres, making them less accessible, and incurring greater costs.<sup>57</sup>

**Access to geographically distant services may be prevented by prohibitive transport costs, and time constraints.** When services can be accessed, they may refer newcomers to other locations for more specialized, appropriate, or less overloaded service points, requiring even more time and financial investment.<sup>21</sup> Newcomers interviewed also confirmed that hybrid access options, such as online and telephone service delivery were a welcome adaptation, as it reduced travel time and costs, and allowed flexibility around other work and home commitments.

## Gender Roles

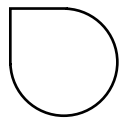
Newcomer women, and non-gender conforming folk, face intersecting barriers in accessing employment services. Women often are the primary caregiver for their children, or children in their immediate family. Combined with the lack of an existing support system or network, the prohibitive costs of daycare or other paid childcare services, and cultural beliefs against the use of formal childcare, this may make it more difficult for many women to access services, or find employment.<sup>58</sup> Similarly cultural gender norms around women's role in the home may prevent them from accessing services, either out of a sense of personal responsibility or guilt, or due to pressure from community or family members.<sup>59</sup> Interviewees over the course of this research affirmed that gendered service delivery affected ability to access equitable resources for many newcomers.

These gendered issues compound a myriad of other intersectional barriers faced by LGBTQIA2S+ newcomer women and other gender non-conforming newcomers, many of whom come to Canada as single parents.<sup>60</sup> The intersectional barriers faced by queer or gender non-conforming newcomers contribute to challenges in accessing services- social isolation and previous traumas play a role, since many migrate to Canada due to persecution for their sexual or gender preferences, or for access to gender affirming health care.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, insecurity in housing, lack of resources dedicated to specific intersecting needs, and experiences of discrimination and heterosexism due to their identities provide significant barriers to service access for newcomers who are members of the LGBTQIA2S+ community.<sup>62</sup>

## Institutional and Systemic Barriers

The structure of Canadian institutions present barriers to newcomers. Employment service staff are frequently overwhelmed with high client workloads, and increased responsibilities, a fact confirmed by providers and government representatives interviewed for this research.<sup>21</sup> This lack of time and resources leads to newcomers being placed in jobs that aren't aligned with their previous skills and education, with limited follow-up due to the lack of capacity from under-funded and overwhelmed service providers.<sup>21</sup> Many newcomers and service providers interviewed felt that newcomers were being rushed through the system, without a personalized approach to service delivery that accounted for skills, or lived experiences.

The inflexible schedules and structured systems of employment services put in place to address the large amount of need may present a barrier to access for newcomers, for whom the rigid system, such as the process of booking an appointment, can be daunting or unfamiliar.<sup>63</sup> Due to this, service providers experience high levels of walk-in clients, further overwhelming a struggling system. The fact that many service providers offer assistance in one unique area (e.g. employment but not housing) further increases challenges for newcomers surrounding the issues of childcare, transit, appointments, and other barriers discussed above.<sup>64</sup>



These barriers to accessing employment services represent a large investment, in time, commitment, coordination, and money. Experiencing economic disadvantage because of immigration and under- or un-employment comes with a financial burden that enhances existing inequities. **By requiring newcomers to bear this burden to access “free” services, they are really being asked to shoulder a large cost which many cannot afford.**





## Gaps in Existing Services

Despite this extensive service delivery system, gaps in employment services and resources still remain. Services are fragmented, and information on what is available is scattered, resulting in limited awareness amongst newcomers.<sup>64</sup> Current service delivery may be unable to deliver to the specific needs of some newcomers, whether it be lived experience, demographic, or occupational.

### Scattered Resources

One of the gaps in newcomer employment service delivery is the fragmented nature of the information regarding what resources are available. The difficulties faced by newcomers in researching and identifying available and appropriate services is compounded by the overwhelming amount of information available and technical literacy or language barriers. **There is a clear gap between the available services, and the knowledge and awareness of these services by newcomers.** Low promotion and outreach from organizations and the IRCC has been identified by service providers as one of the origins of low engagement with employment services.<sup>21</sup> Service providers interviewed for this research cited low uptake of available employment opportunities and programs as a direct outcome of this.

The available services themselves are widely scattered, with many related services being provided by different organizations, at different governmental or non governmental levels, and in different locations. These physical barriers and lack of communication between providers represents a gap in existing service provision.<sup>64</sup>

In an effort to mitigate this gap, Ontario recently launched the

employment services transformation, which is being piloted around Ontario before complete rollout.<sup>63</sup> The intent of the transformation is to integrate all provincially-distributed employment services supports to prevent duplication of efforts, and develop one central source for service provision.<sup>65</sup> This transformation is intended to bring three major shifts to the Ontario employment service sector:

- 1) a singular integrated pathway for employment services, to be overseen exclusively by Employment Ontario;
- 2) 15 local Service System Managers (SSM) who will oversee service contracts at a local level, rather than a provincial level;
- 3) employment service providers (ESP) will receive incentive-based funding based on performance (measured in employment retention) rather than client volume.<sup>65</sup>

Many ESPs still lack significant information about the process and outcomes of the transformation, such as understanding the new funding structure, how it may impact pre-employment support, the impact on programming flexibility, youth-specific programs and support, and the potential increase in cases. As the pilot rollout has not yet been implemented in Toronto due to the high complexity of the region, service providers interviewed were unsure of the potential impacts on their work, and the experiences of newcomers. They expressed concern that the increased administrative burdens and highly specific indicators required for funding might prioritize immediate employment over lasting support, and could jeopardize staff's ability to foster trust and relationships within newcomer communities. In particular the emphasis on retention was identified as potentially problematic, as it might not take into account the variety of reasons that newcomers may stop working at current employment.

Newcomers interviewed discussed that they felt passed around between providers, without one direct care provider. Others described how exclusivity agreements with employment service providers left them in a vulnerable situation if they were not receiving adequate support. Currently, ESPs are disincentivized from referring job seekers to other service providers, due to the complexities of internal systems. There is potential for this proposed transformation to create a more collaborative environment between Employment Ontario and ESPs, through a more unified provincial system.<sup>68</sup>

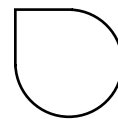
### Specificity


Another gap in employment service delivery is the lack of services designed for specific high-needs population groups, or for those with particular work experience or qualifications. The newcomers we interviewed also noted that the jobs they are presented with do not match their years of experience and education, often leading to low self-confidence and frustration. In fact, data shows that only **a little more than 1/3 of newcomers have employment similar in nature to previous professional experience, and less than 1/4 obtain jobs that match their education.**<sup>48</sup> In large part this is due to the fact that ESPs with overstretched resources may generalize the needs of newcomers out of necessity, and refer them to survival jobs rather than providing more resource consumptive services.<sup>21</sup>

Newcomer cisgender women in particular frequently find themselves pushed into long-term trajectories of low-waged, low-skilled, precarious, and feminized positions that did not align with their academic and professional experience.<sup>21</sup> Another contributing factor is the relationships some non-profit

employment services hold with specific companies who are eager for entry-level, “low-skill” labour. Some employment services offer partial funding to support employers in hiring newcomers, however this means that newcomers may find themselves in positions with limited opportunity for growth or advancement, or at greater risk of termination of employment once the funding opportunity ends.

Service provision to support employment often does not cater to specific needs. English language skills are prioritized for job seekers, they rarely include terminology required for highly technical or specialized jobs. While some direct mentorship programs exist in an effort to close this gap, newcomers interviewed highlighted that these employment mentors are frequently not sector- or industry-specific, in particular healthcare professionals. The lack of sector-specific mentors leaves newcomers to navigate career pathways without expert knowledge of the local landscapes. Groups with career or skill-specific needs when it comes to employment may not have these needs addressed in service provision, in favour of a one-size-fits-all approach. Employment service providers interviewed also mentioned that their funding can be dependent on how many individuals find employment through their service, therefore high-needs newcomers may be too time consuming and not prioritized. This may include not only those with career specific needs, but also those with intersectional needs based on their lived experiences such as women, LGBTQIA2S+ populations, racialized newcomers, those who have experienced trauma, or youth.<sup>66</sup>





# Barriers Preventing Employers from Hiring Newcomers

## Canadian Employment Landscape

The Canadian labour market trends indicate that industries such as trades,<sup>67</sup> construction,<sup>68</sup> healthcare,<sup>69</sup> and technology<sup>70</sup> have a need for more workers. The need for workers in hospitality, retail, and food service has reached an all-time high in Canada and healthcare workers represent one in seven job vacancies.<sup>71</sup> These trends are largely in response to an ageing population,<sup>19</sup> and the significant stressors on essential workers over the course of the pandemic. The labour shortages are opening up new opportunities for newcomers, and channels for immigration. However, **the challenges in finding employment for newcomers, as well as the rising cost of living across Canada, is inspiring many young newcomers to feel disillusioned** from their initial expectations, and spurring increased “return migration” or a return to country of origin.<sup>72,1</sup> It is clear that the barriers to accessible and equitable employment will, and perhaps already are, causing great harm to the Canadian economy.

Unfortunately there is a disconnect between the influx of newcomers with specific skills, and the open positions and hiring practices in Canada. While the national points system prioritizes university educated, skilled-workers to enter and settle in Canada, the industries that are experiencing a shortage of workers do not consistently match the expertise being prioritized in the immigration system. Employment service providers interviewed for this research felt that while there is some mismatch between immigration policy and practical reality, lack of Canadian certifications, and discrimination from employers significantly amplify this gap. Newcomers to Canada are often shocked by strict and persistent labour market barriers!<sup>1</sup> This is problematic as their skills are left under-utilized, causing frustration and

mental distress, while the labour market continues to suffer from a lack of workers. While there remain openings in the labour market for newcomers, employment service providers may find themselves overwhelmed with the hiring demands of the market alongside the resource commitment required to prepare and refer newcomers appropriately.<sup>73</sup>

## Employer Perceptions

Most Canadian employers are not hiring qualified newcomers at the same rate as those born in Canada, underutilizing the skills, education, and experience which could benefit their company and the Canadian economy. **There is a broad range of perceptions, misconceptions, and discriminatory hiring practices that may negatively influence employers' desire to hire newcomers.**

One of the primary factors preventing hiring newcomers is the low recognition by employers of foreign universities or regulatory bodies that provided their credentials.<sup>74</sup> The lack of name recognition and ability to determine the skill level of newcomer applicants based on education and past workplace experience may prove a deterrent to hiring. As many of the employers and service providers interviewed mentioned, Canadian-educated or trained individuals have the advantage of bringing highly recognizable names and locations to their resumé, that bring with them a sense of prestige, and an implicit understanding of the skills and work necessary to complete the accreditation in question.

Similarly, there may be a variety of assumptions made by employers regarding the capacity of a potential employee based on their name. Assumptions of newcomer language ability, and understanding of Canadian workplace culture can affect employers

hiring decisions.<sup>39</sup> These barriers limit the ability and willingness of employers to bring newcomers into their workplaces, and put their skills, knowledge, and experience to good use. Employment service providers also highlighted that some employers may be reluctant to recruit newcomers through service provision agencies, as they believe the assistance from service providers indicates the newcomer candidates do not have the skill set to get the job independently. These misconceptions around hiring newcomers represent a clear need for improved strategies for assessing, interviewing, and hiring newcomers.

## Policy and Regulation

There are certain regulations, policies, and misunderstandings around them that may make employers shy away from hiring newcomers. Many employers lack detailed information around the legalities of employment for newcomers, at various stages in the immigration process. Employers may hesitate to hire newcomers based on lack of knowledge around a newcomer's ability to work under specific visa types, due to the complexities of work permits, refugee status nuances, or simply the perceptions of newcomers job retention.<sup>75</sup>

As discussed previously, some professions are regulated, which makes it challenging for newcomers to find employment in their areas of expertise- in fact in 2016, only 25% of newcomers to Ontario were employed in the regulated profession they worked in before arriving.<sup>13</sup> While newcomers may have the training and experience necessary for specific jobs, provincial rules around Canadian accreditation or licensing make it challenging or expensive for employers to hire newcomers within the boundaries of legal work.<sup>76</sup> Some employers may also value Canadian work

experience, or a knowledge of work culture which is often cited as the primary reason that newcomers are unable to obtain employment aligned with their qualifications, something confirmed by the employers interviewed for this research.<sup>76</sup> Needing Canadian experience is often not about technical knowledge. In fact in Ontario, employers are not allowed to ask for Canadian work experience, unless it is of genuine relevance to the job. However, even when not asked for in job descriptions, employers may still see experience in Canada as equivalent to the ability of a newcomer to conform to Canadian work culture, mannerisms, and rules.

Many employers in Ontario have internal policies around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), which are used to inform diverse hiring practices. While not standardized, most companies prioritize historically oppressed and under-represented groups, such as women, racialized populations, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and members of the LGBTQIA2S+ community.<sup>77</sup> While many of these groups intersect with newcomers, it is rare to

find (if ever) a hiring policy that explicitly sets standards for the hiring and representation of newcomers. This lack of clear policy and measurement may be disincentivizing employers from hiring newcomers.

## Work Culture

For many employers, an area of concern when hiring a newcomer is their understanding of the work culture in Canada as well as the soft skills needed to navigate colleagues and job dynamics. Although newcomers may speak English well and have used English in professional settings, **it is the subtle communication and understanding of “unspoken rules” that may translate as not fitting into the “work culture”.**<sup>78</sup> Employers identified Canadian work culture skills as hard to quantify elements that are important to the team, but that newcomers with limited Canadian work experience may not have acquired yet. Service providers also mentioned that newcomers may not recognize lacking soft skills as a gap, and focus solely on getting the job instead of also what it takes to keep the job.

For both employers, and newcomers entering the workforce, there is not enough information on how to effectively integrate into a Canadian workplace.<sup>63</sup> Participants interviewed for this report stated that for employers this may be seen as a costly and unnecessary use of time and resources. Instead, employers may look for Canadian experience as a stand in for these poorly defined skills, and use this to support the reasoning behind their decision to not hire newcomers, resulting in discriminatory hiring practices. ESPs interviewed also identified this gap.



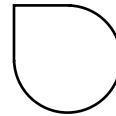
## Gaps in Network & Social Capital - “It’s about who you know”

In order to reduce hiring costs and time investment, many employers choose to hire internally, or reward referrals from current employees. This cuts down on necessary training, improves retention and performance, and reduces recruitment costs, while ensuring the candidate fits the company culture. This practice requires new hires to already be employed, or be closely linked to a network of individuals or organizations in their chosen field.

Newcomers to Canada rarely have professional links and networks immediately upon arrival, which leaves them at a disadvantage when identifying and competing for jobs. One of the newcomers interviewed mentioned how this lack of network influences access to reliable job postings and opportunities. Often newcomers are vulnerable to scams due to their limited insight into the Canadian system and absence of strong networks to help them navigate the labour market. This lack of social capital, defined as resources that are embedded in individuals’ social ties, such as friends, associations and communities,<sup>79</sup> may force newcomers to find precarious survival work to meet their immediate needs.

Newcomers who have social capital have an easier time securing relevant jobs to their qualification through informal channels (even within the informal market).<sup>79</sup>

Gaps in networks are also a challenge for employers who want to hire newcomers but do not know where to begin. **Employers struggle to tap into newcomers’ skills because they do not know how or where to find skilled newcomers.** This was reiterated during the primary research with employment service providers and employers, who identified the need for strategies to connect employers with newcomers in a more effective manner. There needs to be a collaborative and coordinated effort at all levels to open the labour market to the highly skilled newcomers in search of employment, and connect them with employers whose needs match their experience and skill set.



**“Newcomers to Canada rarely have professional links and networks immediately upon arrival, which leaves them at a disadvantage when identifying and competing for jobs.”**

# Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report, Impakt Foundation has developed a set of recommendations for the newcomer employment sector. The recommendations provided in this document are the first steps towards improved access to critical employment services, financial independence for newcomers, and sustainable economic growth in Canada. They outline an approach towards the development of a more inclusive society that allows newcomers to access equitable, appropriate, and dignified employment. We look forward to a time when all newcomers living in Canada have 'equal treatment with respect to employment'.<sup>80</sup> These research-based recommendations are intended for employers, government, employment service providers, newcomers, and Impakt Foundation.

The Impakt Foundation has made the commitment to use these recommendations as guidance for the scope and direction of our own work, with the goal of delivering evidence-based programming that addresses the needs of the communities we

serve, in a way best aligned with our values and resources. The research defines a human-centered approach to service delivery, which humanizes and supports newcomers by making personal connections, and offers individualized service delivery based on need, for both newcomers and employers. Impakt Foundation's new approach will be a one-on-one, tailored approach that works with both newcomers and employers to create an equitable labour market. Through this revised approach, the Foundation will develop new partnerships, build communities and relationships, enhance measures of outcomes and reporting transparency, and provide personal level support to newcomers and employers.

Impakt Foundation is tailoring these sector-wide recommendations internally, ensuring the work we are undertaking follows this guidance. Throughout the comprehensive recommendations detailed for external stakeholders below, you will also find the commitments that the Impakt Foundation is making to their own community and the newcomers it serves.

## Standards for Success

Setting standards for and within organizations, service providers, and government, has the potential to influence change by creating accountability, and encouraging others in the sector to achieve at a similar level. These recommendations identify strategies for developing reasonable, relevant, and relatable standards, in order to measure achievements, and set benchmarks for what defines success.

● Governments and Employment Service Providers should identify clear recommendations and guidelines to facilitate the hiring of newcomers. Recommendations in this area include:

- Employers create company-wide commitment to hiring and integrating newcomers through concrete and public goal-setting, and clearly defined measures. One example of an organization already employing this strategy is Accenture.
- Service providers develop and release a set of standards that once met will allow organizations to be identified as equal opportunity employers who have made clear commitments to hiring newcomers. Tent Partnership for Refugees has already begun in this direction by developing a list of organizations who have made commitments to hire refugees.



**The Foundation is expanding its commitment to data creation and sharing. Through the expansion of our public-private partnerships, we will work to help organizations develop and commit to clear outcomes regarding newcomer hiring practices, and create a system of accountability. We will hold ourselves to these same standards of transparency and reporting.**



## Justice | Equity | Diversity | Inclusion

Justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in hiring are the values companies and organizations should incorporate into their hiring practices. This approach requires employers to address systematic inequalities in their hiring, through practices that account for existing barriers, and encourage diverse representation and experiences in their workforce. Recommendations and resources to support J.E.D.I. principles in hiring will reduce discrimination, improve equal representation, and create a more inclusive labour market.

Changing hiring practices to ensure that they are rooted in a justice-based, inclusive approach, is a critical element of equitable hiring practices. Recommendations for stakeholders to increase this capacity include:

- Employers provide accessible job interviews to all applicants. This may mean online interview processes, paid interviews, covering transport costs, childcare options, sending interview questions in advance, and transparency in job postings.
- Revise applicant review practices to accurately assess newcomers' skills, through strategies such as in-depth sensitivity training for hiring managers and departments, implementing blind hiring strategies, and using job-specific skill-based assessments.

**Impakt Foundation's future work in expanding and deepening public-private partnerships will prioritize supporting employers in developing more inclusive hiring practices, and internal awareness, through outreach endeavours such as lunch and learns, trainings, and consulting. The Foundation will work with organizations to ensure internal policies are welcoming, inclusive, and equitable towards newcomers.**

Ensuring that workplaces are inclusive beyond hiring practices will create greater networks and opportunities for newcomers, as well as a workplace with greater diversity of skills and experiences. Recommendations in this area include:

- Employers identify newcomers as a specific population of interest within internal Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies, recognizing the systemic barriers to employment being faced, and making commitments towards more equitable hiring practices.
- Internal training in the principles of justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion should be applied within workplaces at all levels, from C-Suite, directors, and board, through senior management, supervisors, and employees so that the principles are consistently applied.
- Employers provide flexible benefits that employees can customize to their specific needs, such as enhanced mental health coverage for employees who have had traumatizing experiences.

## Collaboration

There is a need for increased effective partnerships and collaboration between all stakeholders, from community-based service providers to government agencies. Effective strategies and tools for collaboration will enhance the quality and accessibility of services, reduce duplication of efforts, improve resource usage, and strengthen a holistic approach in employment services for newcomers. Ontario is currently piloting the employment services transformation (EST), where a core goal is to improve collaboration between providers and limit duplication of services and strain on resources. The program is still in its initial phases and has not been rolled out to the GTA, so the impact remains to be seen. Therefore it is anticipated that while the EST may address the issue of collaboration, these recommendations will remain necessary.

**Impakt Foundation has committed to supporting collaboration in the newcomer employment sector through our partnerships. The Foundation will work to create a network of employment service providers that can enhance one another's service delivery, by sharing and collating.**

Inter- and intra-sectoral collaboration between Employment Service Providers and Government will reduce the duplication of resources, and therefore overall demand on shared funding resources. Some resources to advance this process include:

- Providers collaborate to provide initial outreach from one centralized community-specific physical location where newcomers can drop-in and access a variety of services.
- Providers and government collaborate to develop and manage a digital resource that contains all relevant newcomer services, ranging from employment, travel subsidies, and childcare programs, to cross-sectoral related supports such as employee rights/legal groups and housing supports.
- Providers dedicate specific caseworkers exclusively to directing newcomers toward appropriate services with varying providers, reducing administrative workload, and better connecting newcomers between services.
- Providers and government work together to adapt current job resources (e.g. Job Bank Canada) into one unique location for newcomers to identify diverse job opportunities.

Collaboration between Employment Service Providers and Employers will facilitate and expand Public-Private Partnerships, creating a smoother pathway to employment for newcomers. This will help newcomers in upskilling and staying competitive within the Canadian labour market. Recommendations include:

- Employers and providers work together to develop the specific sets of soft skills employers look for, and assist in training and delivery to newcomers.
- Employers and providers develop industry-specific relationships, and expand general networks so that more employers can be connected to qualified newcomers.
- Providers and employers publicize internships and bridging programs, as well as available accreditation or training subsidies to enable newcomers who are upskilling their capacity.
- Providers work with employers to identify and train workplace champions who advocate for the hiring of newcomers, are responsible for building networks between newcomers, and relevant employers, and facilitate the internal and external mentorship of newcomers.

**The Foundation is also enhancing their public-private partnerships to provide newcomers with one-on-one skill specific mentorship services, expand newcomer networks, and support employers in developing internal workplace champions and advocates.**



## Policy & Practice

Working with the government to improve policies for access to employment for newcomers is necessary for sustainable change that keeps employers accountable. Recommendations around developments at the national or provincial level will create clearer guidelines for employers and service providers, as well as providing financial support for interventions that enhance the experiences of newcomers entering the labour force.

National and provincial policy changes that work to address systemic and institutional barriers to the workforce play an important role in making appropriate and equitable employment more accessible to newcomers. Some recommendations in this area include:

- Re-evaluate provincial policy regarding which professions are regulated in Ontario.
- Review provincial and federal policies regarding increasing minimum wage, or providing universal basic income. These policies would allow newcomers to defer survival jobs in favour of their personal desired employment.
- Create and expand existing policies which incentivize hiring of newcomers through tax benefits or wage subsidies.
- Explicitly address newcomer treatment and rights in organizational and provincial policy, identifying newcomers in key equity issues such as pay equality.
- Facilitate the entry of newcomers into Canada based on labour market requirements, specifically when it comes to allowing “unskilled” labour to enter and remain in the country.

Government funding based on community-identified needs will help to prioritize financial support in areas of greatest impact. Recommendations in this area include:

- Increase funding for employment related service provision based on community and service provider identified outcomes, rather than in a pay-for-performance model.
- Identify areas where additional subsidies are required in order to increase newcomer uptake of services, based on metrics from service providers. Examples include travel costs to service provision locations, or fees for equivalency or accreditation services, including translation.

**Impakt Foundation commits to advocacy, outreach, and raising awareness with policy makers in an effort to continue advancing the opportunities available to newcomers in Ontario. Using evidence and best practice from our work, and the work of other service providers and experts, the Foundation will advocate for the needs of newcomer communities.**

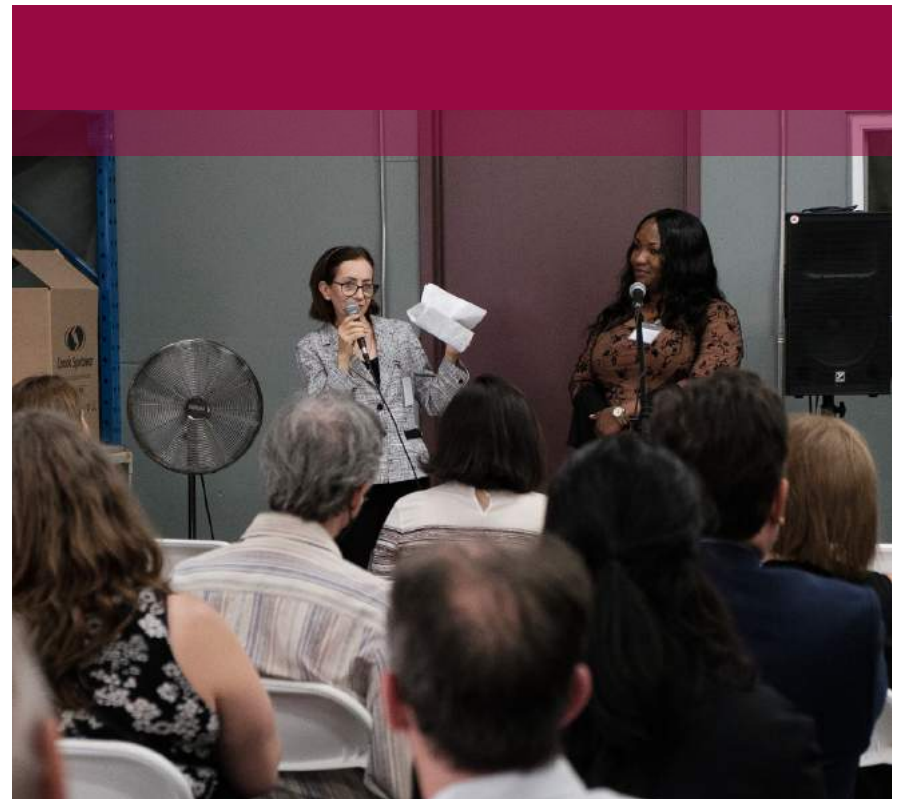
## Tailored Support Services

There is a need to work with newcomers on a personalized basis, tailoring services based on individual needs, rather than treating them as a homogenous group and developing cookie-cutter approaches to service delivery. These recommendations emphasize the need for personal, one-on-one services that address nuanced individual requirements around personal work and life experience, language, intersectional inequities, and more.

Employers' need-specific employment support to newcomers, beyond what is delivered by service providers, will provide newcomers with greater capacity and inclusion in the workplace. Recommendations in this area include:

- Create mentorship opportunities between employers and employees and employment services to connect newcomers with individuals who have experience in specific skillsets.
- Organize on-the-job language training for newcomers who need sector-specific language support.
- Subsidize professional development and training through service commitments, where employers facilitate training or accreditation if the newcomer is willing to make a long-term commitment.
- Create and support internal working groups that champion newcomers, alongside other critical justice, diversity, equity, and inclusivity issues.
- Make information on recruitment criteria, hiring process, open opportunities, and employment requirements readily available. Recruitment sessions such as these are frequently held by World Skills Ottawa.

**Through the research and recommendations identified, the Impakt Foundation has made the commitment to approach employment service delivery in a way that prioritizes the individual and their needs. These recommendations, will become a core tenant of the Foundation's approach.**



# Glossary

**Assimilate/Assimilation:** The process of adopting to some degree the culture, values, and traditions of the new place of habitation, in order to share common characteristics with the host community.

**Asylum seeker:** A person seeking asylum in Canada who does not currently hold refugee status, but makes a refugee claim at a Canadian port of entry or online, and has their eligibility for refugee status determined through a hearing process.

**Civil Society Organizations:** A non-governmental organization, including non-profit, community, and volunteer organizations that operate free from governance by the state.

**COVID-19 Pandemic:** The spread of the highly infectious SARS-CoV-2 virus globally, causing major negative health, economic, and systemic issues, many of which continue to evolve.

**Discrimination:** The unfair treatment of people or groups based on characteristics, such as sex, race, or country of origin.

**Diversity:** The principle that there are a broad variety of individuals with strongly varying characteristics and qualities. Often in reference to all of these types of people being valued and included in an environment.

**Equity/Equitable:** Equity is about giving people what they need given their circumstances, in order to adjust for imbalances. Equity is about recognizing individual circumstances and accounting for them in an ongoing fashion, in order to ensure that everyone has the same opportunities.

**Equitable employment:** The equitable representation of all peoples, in particular equity seeking groups (such as newcomers, visible minorities groups, peoples with disabilities, etc.), in all employment opportunities.

**Employment service provider:** Employment services in Ontario are provided by third party service providers, who receive government funding and provide tailored employment services to their community of focus. These providers must meet certain criteria identified by the provincial government.

**Employment Services Transformation:** A program currently being piloted and rolled out in Ontario by the provincial government, with the intent to integrate all provincially distributed employment services through a central source to prevent duplication of efforts.

**Essential workers (front-line workers):** Employees whose work is considered essential to the infrastructure and health of the general population. This may include individuals in supply chains, health care workers, and those who work with physical infrastructure, amongst others.

**Gender norms:** Misconceptions about the roles and responsibilities that guide the behaviour of individuals based on the sex they were assigned at birth, and their gender identity.

**Greater Toronto Area (GTA):** The Greater Toronto Area includes the city of Toronto (consisting of six local boroughs – Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough, York, East York, and Toronto) the adjacent cities of Mississauga and Brampton.

**Inclusion:** The act of embracing diversity through personal and systemic reform, in particular in the workplace, to acknowledge and value the differences between individuals, and overcome barriers, enabling that diversity to thrive.

**Informal sector/Informal economy:** Economic production and employment activities that operate outside the traditional economy, and are not taxed, governed, or policed.  
**Integration:** The process of incorporating all people into existing institutions and culture of the community or nation, with the expectation of involvement in, and adjustment to the standard requirements of these institutions.

**Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC):** Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is a federal organization that facilitates the arrival of immigrants, provides protection to refugees, and offers programming to help newcomers settle in Canada, along with granting citizenship and issuing travel documents to Canadians.

**Irregular border crosser:** Individuals who crossed the border into Canada between the official ports of entry, and have not had any official determination of their eligibility to reside in Canada.

**Landed immigrant:** a person who has the ability to live permanently in Canada after immigrating from their country of origin.

**LGBTQIA2S+:** An acronym which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit, and any additional ways in which people choose to describe their gender identity.

**National Occupational Classification (NOC) System:** Canada's system for describing and ranking occupations in regards to immigration, educational, or other responsibilities.

**Newcomer:** Landed immigrants who came to Canada in the five years previous to the given year. In this report, other groups of newcomers such as asylum seekers and irregular border crossers are covered by this terminology.

**Non-standard labour (contract work/gig work):** Employment that deviates from the standard of continuous, full time employment with a specific employer. This can include part-time or on call, temporary employment, self-employment, or contract work. Often non-standard labour can be characterized as having limited to no benefits and a lack of job security.

**Racialized individual:** A person that is marginalized due to their race, or affected by discrimination, and often is perceived as a member of a visible minority group.

**Refugee:** A refugee is someone who was forced to flee their country due to persecution, war or violence. Convention refugees are those outside their country of origin, have a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. This definition is used in Canadian law.

**Regulated sector:** Companies within certain industries must comply with specific laws applicable to that industry within the nation in which they operate, which could involve a requirement to obtain a licence or permit, or need for additional filings.

**Settlement services:** These are the services, funded by the federal government, and delivered by third-party providers, that support newcomers and refugees to adjust and settle in Canada. The services range from translation, language classes, finding employment, registering children to schools, etc.

**Service industry:** Any industry that specializes in customer facing work and services, or occasionally the delivery of goods (excluding manufacturing). Common examples may be restaurant servers, or customer support. Although it is an essential part of a healthy economy, the service industry positions tend to be low paid and precarious.

**Skilled labour:** Typically refers to work where employees require the completion of certification or extended education, and often implies a higher paying position. Under the NOC system, "skilled" labour typically requires a university or college education, including specialised training or apprenticeships.

**Survival job/work:** This is work that is not related to an individual's chosen profession but obtained out of necessity, for subsistence.

**Transport poverty:** Poverty related to limited mobility, transport affordability, and lack of accessibility to transit.

**Under-employment:** When individuals are working unwillingly in work that does not use the extent of their skill-set, and are experiencing low pay or limited employment opportunities.

**Unskilled labour:** In Canadian NOC, it is defined as work where lower education level is required, and is often perceived as less impactful, and with lower pay than other work.

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