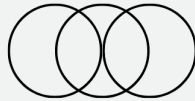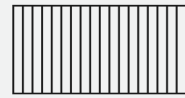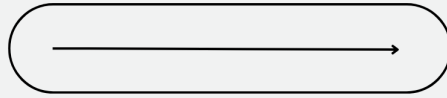WOMEN
WORK &
ECONOMY

POLICY BRIEF

Advancing Equity and Inclusion: Strategies for Integrating Racialized Immigrant Women into Canada's Labour Market

by Marika Jezoriek

Executive Summary

Racialized immigrant women in Canada face significant barriers to labour market integration, marked by underemployment, discrimination, and underutilization of their skills. Dr. Ana Ferrer's research highlights the triad of barriers these women face: discrimination, credentialing challenges, and limited employment opportunities (Ferrer, 2024). Moreover, the gender wage gap and labour market participation rates underscore the systemic inequities, with immigrant women facing the largest within-job gender wage gap (Drolet, M., & Mardare Amini, M., 2023, p.5; Devillard et al., 2017, p.43).

Acknowledging the unique vulnerabilities and needs of racialized immigrant women is crucial for developing gender-responsive migration governance (UN Women, n.d.). Canada's current immigration programs, despite the country's efforts to champion the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM), remain largely gender-neutral, failing to adequately address these challenges (Government of Canada, 2022; International Labour Organization, n.d.).

This brief proposes a set of policy alternatives focused on reducing discrimination, enhancing credential recognition, and addressing institutional and cultural barriers. Recommendations include establishing a National Task Force on Credential Recognition, expanding language and professional development programs, implementing childcare support based on Quebec's successful model, and promoting voluntary adoption of workplace anti-discrimination and inclusion initiatives. To successfully integrate racialized immigrant women into Canada's

labour market and society, a concerted effort from federal and provincial governments, professional licensing bodies, educational institutions, and employers is required. These strategies not only aim to support racialized immigrant women and their families but also seek to enrich Canada's social and economic fabric by leveraging the full potential of this underrepresented demographic.

Problem Statement

In 2021, women represented half of Canada's population, with 26.8% belonging to a racialized group and 23.8% being immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2023b). The proportion of racialized immigrant women has significantly increased, from 55% of newcomer women immigrants identified as visible minorities in 1981 to 84% in 2016 (Momani et al., 2021, p.2), highlighting the urgent need for policy adaptation in response to shifting demographics. Despite its commitment to lead in gender-responsive migration under the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM) (Government of Canada, 2022), Canada faces challenges in translating this vision into practice. The Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship, acknowledges the significant barriers racialized immigrant women face in workforce entry, stressing the importance of enhancing their sense of dignity and belonging beyond mere employment (Government of Canada, 2022).

Racialized immigrant women encounter dual layers of marginalization, being both women and part of a visible minority. Dr. Ana Ferrer's study, "Canada's Racialized Immigrant Women and the Labour Market," reveals that these women disproportionately experience professional and social discrimination, and underemployment, despite being qualified (Ferrer, 2024). The findings indicate that 66% of respondents faced professional discrimination, while 59% encountered social discrimination. Additionally, 79% identified credential recognition as a significant barrier to employment, with many being overqualified or unable to work in their trained fields (Ferrer, 2024). These challenges are compounded by a gender wage gap, where immigrant women landing as adults encounter the most substantial disparities within the job market (Drolet, M., & Mardare Amini, M., 2023, p.5; Devillard et al., 2017, p.43).

Addressing these complex issues necessitates a genuinely gender-responsive approach in migration governance, one that precisely acknowledges and caters to the unique experiences, needs, and vulnerabilities of racialized immigrant women (UN Women, n.d.). Without significant policy interventions, Canada risks perpetuating the marginalization of this demographic, overlooking their potential contributions to both the economy and societal fabric. Stakeholders across the board, from the women themselves and their families to employers, policymakers, and the broader society, stand to benefit from more inclusive and equitable policies.

Policy Alternatives

The International Labour Organization outlines that migration governance frameworks can show gender bias (ones that explicitly discriminate based on gender), be gender neutral

(overlook gender-specific needs or circumstances), or be gender-responsive (address normative bias and discrimination related to gender or gender identity) (International Labour Organization, n.d.). Canada considers itself to be a champion country for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and recognizes that encouraging a gender-responsive approach to migration management is a key priority (Government of Canada, 2022). Unfortunately, current immigration programs at the federal and provincial level are not targeted for women, and therefore they remain gender neutral instead of gender-responsive. The following policy alternatives are designed to address the systemic challenges faced by racialized immigrant women in Canada, aiming to enhance their integration into the labour market and society at large through targeted, evidence-based interventions.

Refine Existing Models for Enhanced Credential Recognition:

The need for specific adjustments in credential recognition processes to better serve racialized immigrant women in Canada has been highlighted by research from Momani et al. (2021, p.9) and Ferrer (2024). They point out the significant challenges these women face due to current credential recognition practices. Despite the Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications aiming to streamline credential recognition through collaboration among provinces, territories, professional organizations, and the federal government (Government of Canada, 2021), there is a noticeable absence of considerations for 'gender,' 'women,' 'race,' or 'discrimination' within the document. For the policy to be genuinely gender-responsive and equitable, it is crucial to reform these processes to eliminate gendered and racial biases, ensuring a fair and just evaluation of the qualifications held by racialized immigrant women.

Broaden and Tailor Language and Professional Development Initiatives:

The crucial influence of language proficiency on labour market success necessitates specialized language and professional development programs for racialized immigrant women. To effectively assist these women in overcoming employment barriers, programs need to extend beyond elementary language instruction. They should include comprehensive job-specific language training and elements of cultural competence to equip them for the Canadian workplace environment (Momani et al., 2021, p.12). Utilizing the Bridging Program for Internationally Educated Professionals at York University as a model, which provides sector-specific language instruction and professional growth opportunities, could serve as a foundation (York University, 2022). Implementing workshops focused on understanding the Canadian job market, along with enhancing resume writing, interview techniques, and offering networking opportunities specifically designed for racialized immigrant women, are essential steps towards improving their access to and participation in the workforce

Advance Childcare Support Drawing on Proven Models:

The importance of accessible and affordable childcare as a lever for enabling the full participation of racialized immigrant women in the labour market is well-documented (Momani

et al., 2021, p.17). Implementing support systems that offer versatile and culturally attuned childcare solutions is paramount for mitigating significant employment obstacles. Such measures align with UN Women's advocacy for integrating caregiving responsibilities into gender-responsive migration governance policies (UN Women, n.d.).

The Quebec childcare model, renowned for significantly boosting labour market engagement among women, exemplifies best practices in this area (Gu, 2022). However, attempts to extend Quebec's successful model nationwide have encountered hurdles, notably in fulfilling the demand for childcare spaces (Statistics Canada, 2023a). These difficulties highlight the necessity for careful policy adaptation that goes beyond mere adoption. Effective replication demands a thorough strategy that encompasses infrastructure development and service delivery to guarantee both access and quality.

Enacting policies inspired by Quebec's childcare successes on a national level entails advocating for affordable care while also rigorously planning the expansion of childcare services. This includes strategic investments in childcare infrastructure, specialized training for childcare providers, and establishing regulations to assure service quality and inclusivity. Policies should detail strategies for increasing childcare availability to satisfy the varied needs of Canadian families, paying special attention to the specific hurdles encountered by marginalized communities, such as racialized immigrant women. Adopting this holistic approach ensures that initiatives for childcare support are not only practical but also foster equity, illustrating the critical link between policy formulation and its execution.

Promote Voluntary Adoption of Workplace Anti-Discrimination and Inclusion Initiatives:

Addressing the discrimination that racialized immigrant women face in professional and social contexts is essential. While mandating anti-discrimination training and inclusive policies in workplaces may not be enforceable, fostering a culture where employers and employees are educated about implicit biases, diversity, and inclusion is crucial. This initiative aims to create supportive environments for all employees, regardless of background, enhancing workplace safety and value for racialized immigrant women (Chadambuka & Essue, 2024, p.2). Establishing transparent mechanisms for discrimination reporting and resolution will further cultivate an inclusive workplace ethos.

To encourage voluntary adoption of such initiatives, drawing inspiration from leading organizations like Google, known for its unconscious bias workshops and diverse recruitment strategies, could prove influential (Google, 2023). Highlighting the benefits of such programs, including improved employee satisfaction, enhanced company reputation, and increased innovation, could motivate Canadian businesses to participate. Additionally, providing recognition or incentives for companies leading in diversity and inclusion efforts, such as awards, public endorsements, or tax incentives, might encourage broader adoption in sectors where racialized immigrant women are underrepresented. Collaborative efforts, including partnerships with industry associations and public campaigns, can raise awareness about the importance of these practices and their positive impact on workplace culture and productivity.

Recommendations

To effectively address the challenges identified, a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach is essential. The following actions are recommended to enhance the integration of racialized immigrant women into Canada's labour market and society:

Convene a National Task Force on Credential Recognition: Mobilize this group to integrate gender and racial considerations into the Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications, ensuring equitable evaluation of qualifications held by racialized immigrant women (Government of Canada, 2021).

Responsible Parties: IRCC, provincial governments, professional licensing bodies.

Enhance Language and Professional Development Opportunities: Expand programs modeled after successful initiatives, focusing on sector-specific language and networking tailored to racialized immigrant women, such as the Bridging Program for Internationally Educated Professionals at York University (York University, 2022).

Responsible Parties: Provincial education departments, post-secondary institutions, and non-profit organizations.

Implement Nationwide Affordable Childcare Support: Tackle the shortage of daycare spots by investing in childcare infrastructure, making services accessible to diverse families, especially those of racialized immigrant women. This recommendation draws on the need for policy adaptation highlighted by the successful Quebec model and its challenges in national replication (Gu, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2023a).

Responsible Parties: Federal and provincial governments, alongside local community organizations.

Promote the Voluntary Implementation of Workplace Anti-Discrimination and Inclusion Programs: Advocate for the voluntary integration of anti-discrimination and inclusion training, inspired by established programs such as those offered by Google. Offer recognition or incentives to enhance participation across industries, particularly in areas where racialized immigrant women are notably underrepresented, considering the complexities surrounding compulsory enforcement (Google, 2023; Chadambuka & Essue, 2024). Furthermore, establish clear protocols for reporting instances of workplace discrimination to ensure accountability and transparency (Google, 2023).

Responsible Entities: In partnership with industry associations, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) should lead the initiative, offering essential resources and acknowledgment to companies that commit to these practices.

Establish Continuous Policy Evaluation and Improvement Mechanisms: Regularly assess policy effectiveness using established metrics, adjusting based on feedback to ensure relevance and impact. This approach is crucial for the ongoing evaluation of initiatives aimed at integrating racialized immigrant women into the labour market (Bardach, 2012).

Responsible Parties: A dedicated unit within IRCC, Statistics Canada, academic institutions.

By taking these steps, grounded in evidence and best practices, Canada can make significant progress towards creating a labour market that fully utilizes the talents of racialized immigrant women, contributing to a stronger, more inclusive economy and society.

Conclusion

Addressing the challenges faced by racialized immigrant women in Canada's labour market requires urgent and collaborative policy action. The recommendations presented aim to bridge the gap between current practices and the inclusive, equitable vision Canada aspires to achieve. Implementing these changes will not only directly improve the lives of these women and their families but also play a crucial role in enhancing Canada's economic growth and social cohesion.

Acknowledgement

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