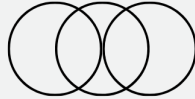
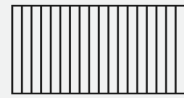
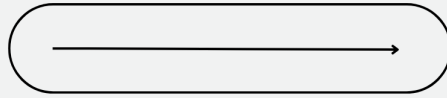


**WOMEN
WORK &
ECONOMY**

POLICY BRIEF

Improving the Employability and Employment Environment of Racialized Immigrant Women

by Ivy Zhiyuan Li

Executive Summary

Racialized immigrant women face challenges in entering the labour market, obtaining equal pay and career upward mobility resulting from race and gender discrimination besides immigrant status (Momani et al., 2021). Research suggests that childcare, language proficiency, Canadian work experience, and recognition of foreign credentials and work experience are key factors that affect their employability. Additionally, Canadian employer-perceived gaps between foreign work experiences and Canadian job requirements, as well as systemic and structural barriers embedded in norms, institutions and cultures, are crucial and long-standing barriers for them to obtain expected or ideal labour market opportunities in terms of professional pursuit and remuneration (Momani, et al., 2021).

The Canadian federal government and provincial governments have some initiatives and programs to address the recognized issues, for example, the Economic Action Plan for women entrepreneurs and the Canadian Child Benefit Program by the federal government; Quebec's universal, low-fee Childcare program, British Columbia's Childcare investment program, Alberta's pilot childcare project (Momani, et al., 2021, pp 24-26). However, recent survey research by Dr. Ana Ferrer and the WWE project team reveals that all the above-mentioned barriers are still prominent, indicating that these initiatives and policies still fall short. Enhancing viable government initiatives, revising less workable programs as well as designing and implementing more customized policies and programs to improve the employability of racialized immigrant women and ameliorate their employment environment are needed.



Problem Statement

1. *Canadian Education and Language Training*

Obtaining a Canadian education after immigration is one big challenge facing racialized immigrant women. Dr. Ferrer and team's survey study (2024) which was based on 694 responses finds that Canadian education aids racialized women in entering the labour market, but the biggest barrier among participants who own a college diploma, BA or MA/PhD degree is "no resources" and the barrier of lacking resources seems to be enhanced after 2019.

Language is another long-standing barrier. In the survey, 56% of the respondents attended the government language program (Ferrer et al., 2024, slide p.15). Currently, LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) and ESL (English as A Second Language) are the two basic government-funded free language programs for immigrants. ESL classes are funded by the provincial government and LINC programs are funded by the federal government (Peel District School Board, 2024).

According to the two main measuring approaches to programs: "output" which mainly refers to the participant number or participation rate and "outcome" which mainly considers the effects of the program on the labour market participation (Momani, et al., 2021, p.23), it seems that the primary government language training programs do not have a satisfactory result in terms of both the output (56%: slightly over half) and outcome (language proficiency is still a big barrier to entering labour market).

2) *Foreign Experience Recognition and Canadian Experience Requirement*

Canadian experience and foreign work experience recognition have been crucial barriers to entering the labour market for all immigrants. According to Dr. Ferrer and team's report, out of 262 respondents, 79% of the participants reported that foreign experience recognition is the main problem and biggest barrier. The second big barrier is lacking references (58%) for finding a job. These two highly reported barriers indeed can be one issue: the "Canadian experience". No Canadian experience also means no one can provide a reference letter for your Canadian experience!

3) *Childcare Responsibility, Role Norm and Devaluing of Care-Related Jobs*

Childcare is a specific barrier for women including racialized immigrant women. According to Dr. Ferrer and team's study, 27% of the 262 respondents reported that childcare is a key problem for them to enter or re-enter the labour market. Studies reveal that child rearing and caring is a big hurdle for immigrant women's reskilling after immigration; culture and family role norms have disadvantaged them economically and economic downturns such as the Covid pandemic hit them most especially racialized women who worked in fields with low pay (Momani, et. al., 2021).

It is noteworthy that Dr. Ferrer and team's study finds that care-related professionals, especially those who have a medical-related credential have the lowest employment rate (53%) and the lowest rate of permanent employment (40%) based on education, and those with medical degrees are more likely to report pay mismatch and job mismatch. Other researchers have similar findings that professionally trained immigrant nurses are often admitted as nurse aides, care aides or PSWs and they are much more over-skilled for their positions than Canadian-born nurses (Momani, et al., 2021, p.16). It is important to explore why those with a medical degree



or professional healthcare training have the lowest employment rate, especially considering the increasing need and dearth of healthcare professionals and workers in Canada.

4) *Discrimination*

Discrimination is a common cautious problem in Canadian society. It is still a big problem facing racialized immigrant women. Dr. Ferrer and team's survey study reports that, among the respondents, 66% reported discrimination in a professional environment and 59% in a social environment. Race and language are the first two reported factors that lead to discrimination: 70% reported discrimination due to race in a professional environment and 73% reported discrimination due to race in a social environment; 60% reported discrimination due to language in a professional environment and 53% reported discrimination due to language in a social environment.

Policy Alternatives and Recommendations

The federal government has made some efforts to address the above-mentioned issues and initiated and implemented Economic Action Plans and programs to facilitate and support immigrant women to enter the labour market and improve their employability. For example, its mentorship programs, Canadian Child Benefit and Investments in early learning and childcare, and flexible EI parental leave measures have produced positive results (Momani, et. al., 2021). For this policy brief, it is proposed that these programs and policies be maintained; programs such as childcare support programs and investment be enhanced and be promoted across Canada through more cooperation between federal and provincial governments, and customized initiatives be developed to facilitate racialized immigrant women's integration to the labour market.

1. *Enhancing Provincial Support for Childcare*

Although government-funded childcare programs contribute to a higher proportion of women's labour market participation, only Quebec has had a "universal low-fee childcare" program since 1997, other provinces have yet to have such a program despite the high demands (Momani, et. al., 2021). It's helpful that during more recent years, some provinces have noted the issue and invested in childcare (e.g., BC), have a pilot project to subsidize childcare (e.g., Alberta) or are promoting providing universal childcare (e.g., Ontario) (Momani, et. al., 2021, p.26), but to make all immigrant women access affordable childcare still have a long way to go. The federal and provincial governments both need to put more attention and effort into facilitating universal childcare.

If low-fee childcare cannot be promoted to cover all households, it is proposed here that the governments consider specific temporary childcare subsidy initiatives to support immigrant women especially racialized newcomer immigrant women to re-skill and enter the labour market, for example, providing childcare subsidies for newcomer women who have enrolled in college or university, as well as during the first several years of their employment.

2. *More Customized Educational Programs and Language Training*

To address the issues of access to Canadian education and to improve language proficiency in a workplace setting, it is recommended that:

1. First, increasing the awareness of government-sponsored programs among newcomers especially racialized women immigrants given the low attendance of government-



funded training programs. This can be done by providing a link leading to the programs (e.g., <https://www.ontario.ca/page/adult-learning-ontario-bridge-training-program>) in the landing paper issued to the new immigrants by IRCC, or by listing the links leading to the government-sponsored educational and training programs on the IRCC website under “For newcomers to Canada—Prepare for life in Canada—Upgrade your skills or education” (IRCC, 2024).

2. Providing subsidies to those who have difficulty paying the assessment fees for their foreign credentials. Additionally, while most newcomers may know about student loans (e.g., OSAP: Ontario Student Assistance Program) or related training bursary (e.g., Ontario Bridge Training Bursary) (Government of Ontario, 2024), few may know “Microloans”, a financial institute that offers low-interest microloans to help immigrant professionals and refugees (Momani, et. al., 2021, p.26). Microloans can be introduced as an accessible option to racialized immigrant women to help them finance tuition for bridge programs and other needs.
3. Establishing more government-funded skill training programs and specific bridge programs. For example, Ontario’s current bridge programs mainly focus on IT, architecture, Healthcare, and finance planning (Government of Ontario, 2024), bridge programs cover broader industries are suggested. Ways to improve awareness of these programs can include but are not limited to workshops and events hosted by local libraries, community centers, immigrant settlement agencies, social media etc.
4. Given that the LINC and ESL classes are oriented for general new immigrants and mainly for daily life functions (Peel District School Board, 2024; Government of Ontario, 2024), it will be helpful to set up and design an advanced language training program customized for professional immigrants who have a relatively high language proficiency, or specifically for racialized immigrant women professionals who possess a higher degree such as an MA/Ph.D. or at least a BA. The content of this language program can be customized with a work-oriented design to facilitate their understanding of Canada’s general work environment, office culture, related employment laws and regulations, workers’ benefits etc.
5. To facilitate the attendance of the language program, a child-care subsidy or free childcare support program is suggested.

3. *Facilitating An Employer-Endorsed and Community-Supported Environment and Promoting Foreign Work Experience Recognition and Acceptance*

Except for the PEI government, the majority of provincial governments emphasize immigrants’ responsibilities to improve their language proficiency and employability but ignore the employers’ responsibilities to recognize the economic value of immigrants and make efforts to build a more inclusive and welcoming community (Momani et al., 2021). To facilitate the labour market integration of racialized immigrant women, an inclusive approach with more cooperation between government, employers and local communities is recommended:

1. Establishing specific organizations (like the “Immigrant & Refugee Services Association (IRSA) PEI”) to facilitate a welcoming and inclusive community. For example, the IRSA-PEI provides short-term settlement services and delivers long-term inclusion and community participation programs for new immigrants by engaging with the federal, provincial, and municipal governments as well as local businesses and communities; Its “Employment Services” include identifying and overcoming



employment barriers, planning careers and accessing education, developing job search plans, understanding Canadian workplace culture etc. (IRSA, 2024).

2. Enhancing cooperation between the government, employers and educational institutions to facilitate the employment of racialized women immigrants. For example, the government (e.g., local Service Ontario) can take the lead and function as a centralized employment information center/repository by involving in and engaging with local employers (not-for-profit organizations, the public sector, and private sector organizations), immigrant settlement organizations, community colleges and local universities.
3. Establishing targeted strategies and programs to facilitate the employment of racialized newcomer immigrant women. Like The Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) (ESDC, 2024) or Youth Job Connection programs (Government of Ontario, 2024), the provincial and/or federal government, for example, may provide wage subsidies to employers to facilitate employment opportunities for racialized women immigrants. Through this program, the government helps cover a portion of the wages for eligible racialized women employees hired by private sector employers, non-profit organizations, and public sector employers. The government can set up requirements such as years of landing (e.g., less than 5 years), period of the program (e.g., covering the first 3 years of the employment) etc.

4. *More Awareness Events, Activities, and Programs to Address the Issue of Discrimination*

To address the discrimination against racialized women immigrants, besides more inclusive and sustainable policies to facilitate the integration of racialized immigrants generally by the federal, provincial and local governments, it is suggested here that more local community-based events, activities, programs, workshops etc. be initiated to educate employers and community members to support the integration, especially the labour market participation of racialized women immigrants.

Besides the above discussions, for the next stage of study and analysis, the following are suggested:

1. *Express Entry (EE) and Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) Participants*

According to Dr. Ferrer and team's survey study, respondents who immigrated under the EE system reported both a slightly higher employment rate and permanent employment rate than respondents who immigrated under PNP. Under the PNP program, if the applicant has an employer (e.g., Ontario's PNP has: Employer Job Offer: Foreign Worker stream; Employer Job Offer: In-Demand Skills stream; Employer Job Offer: International Student stream), it indicates that the applicant has a full-time and permanent job offer (IRCC, 2024), so the applicants with a job offer under the PNP program generally should have a higher rate of employment.

The PNP program also includes the Masters Graduate stream and Ph.D. Graduate stream, so the lower employment rate of PNP respondents may indicate that these two streams have lower



permanent employment rates and employment rates because these applicants do not need to have an employer to qualify for PNP immigration. Data on sub-categories of PNP can be further examined and analyzed. Additionally, some PNP programs can apply for immigration through the EE application system (IRCC, 2024), so, data on these two groups can be further separated and analyzed.

2. *Age and Length of Landing*

The survey covered respondents who landed in Canada from 2005 to 2023 with an age range from 19 to 63 years old. Older and younger groups as well as those who landed in Canada in the year 2005 and recent newcomers may face different barriers. It is suggested that focus groups be conducted according to age (e.g., 20-35; 36-50; 51-63) and length of landing (e.g., less than 5 years; 5-10 years; 11 years and more).

3. *Care-Related Professionals*

As mentioned already, care-related professionals, especially those who have a medical-related credential have the lowest employment rate and are more likely to report pay mismatch and job mismatch, so further survey data analysis and focus group studies in the next stage are suggested.



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