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Toronto Region Immigrant  
Employment Council

Diversity Drives Success

# Six Trends Shaping Immigrant Labour Market Integration

February 2022

# Introduction

Debates about the changing nature of work predate the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis that has accelerated many pre-existing trends. Yet one important dynamic in the future workforce has received scant attention: immigration. Our long-term prosperity will depend on how effectively the skills and knowledge immigrants bring are utilized. In Canada, where the population is aging and birth rates are low, immigration still accounted for about 75% of population growth in 2020-21 when border restrictions were in place.<sup>1</sup> In 2021, Canada welcomed a record number of new permanent residents — more than 401,000.<sup>2</sup>

Despite an immigration system that brings in the best talent, Canada faces challenges successfully integrating newcomers into the labour market. This is reflected in both underemployment, where workers struggle to find jobs commensurate with their experience and skills, and difficulties for businesses to locate the right talent. The problems are particularly acute for immigrant professionals, many of whom lag behind their Canadian counterparts in career progression.

Meanwhile, employers are grappling with shifts that will likely force them to reconsider how they recruit, hire and retain workers. The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a move to fully remote or hybrid work, prompting companies big and small to rethink their workplace strategies. Automation is seeping into many areas of work, the number of gig workers may be rising, traditional retirement may be a relic of the past and lifelong learning is becoming a necessity. A cultural shift is also in the works. A growing number of companies across the globe are heeding calls for diversity and inclusion amid social justice movements led by equity-deserving groups.

As global and local trends continue to shape Canada's labour market, it is pivotal to seek a better understanding of how those forces will, in turn, shape immigrant labour market integration. Understanding how immigrants fare in the changing labour market is important to guiding the economy through the myriad of challenges and uncertainty in 2022 and beyond.

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# Background

Canada is a world leader in attracting the best and brightest workers. More than half of new immigrants in their prime working age hold at least a university bachelor's degree.<sup>3</sup> Immigrants account for about 50% of all workers in Toronto, a major economic hub, and projections indicate that through 2040, all net labour force growth in Canada will come from immigration.<sup>4</sup> Globally, the business case for employing a culturally diverse workforce has become overwhelming, with many studies highlighting how a workplace that reflects and leverages the population can translate into business success.<sup>5</sup> Still, the gap between the economic potential of immigration and immigrants' labour market outcomes in Canada remains wide.

## ***Underutilization of immigrant talent***

Canada has fallen short when it comes to tapping the skills, international knowledge and experiences of immigrants we encouraged to come to this country. Recent immigrants with at least a bachelor's degree are nearly twice as likely as their Canadian-born counterparts to work in jobs that require only a high-school education.<sup>6</sup> In the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) field, for example, over half of immigrants trained at the university level did not work in STEM occupations.<sup>7</sup>

The skills mismatch costs immigrants, employers and the broader economy. One study finds that immigrants were 3.5 times more likely to be unemployed relative to their Canadian-born counterparts.<sup>8</sup> For employed immigrants, the tendency to work in jobs below their education levels may partly explain why only small productivity gains from immigration are realized by firms in Canada.<sup>9</sup> It also explains to some extent why immigrant workers receive wages that are, on average, 10 per cent below those of the Canadian-born population. This deficiency, which spans occupations, age, gender and

region, was estimated in 2019 at \$50 billion a year, or 2.5% of national gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>10</sup> In Ontario, closing the gaps in immigrant unemployment and participation rates could lead to annual gains of \$12-20 billion in real GDP.<sup>11</sup>

The adjusted earnings gap between immigrants and Canadian-born workers narrowed between 2015 and 2019.<sup>12</sup> But the COVID-19 pandemic may have erased the gains. A 2020 Environics survey found that recent immigrants, especially those who are racialized (46%), suffered greater earnings losses than the average Canadian worker (36%) due to the initial onset of the pandemic.<sup>13</sup> Young workers and women, particularly immigrant women, also experienced an outsized employment decline.<sup>14</sup> Pandemic or not, challenges for immigrants are well documented. They include perceived language barriers, lack of access to professional networks, discrimination and discounting of professional experience and credentials.

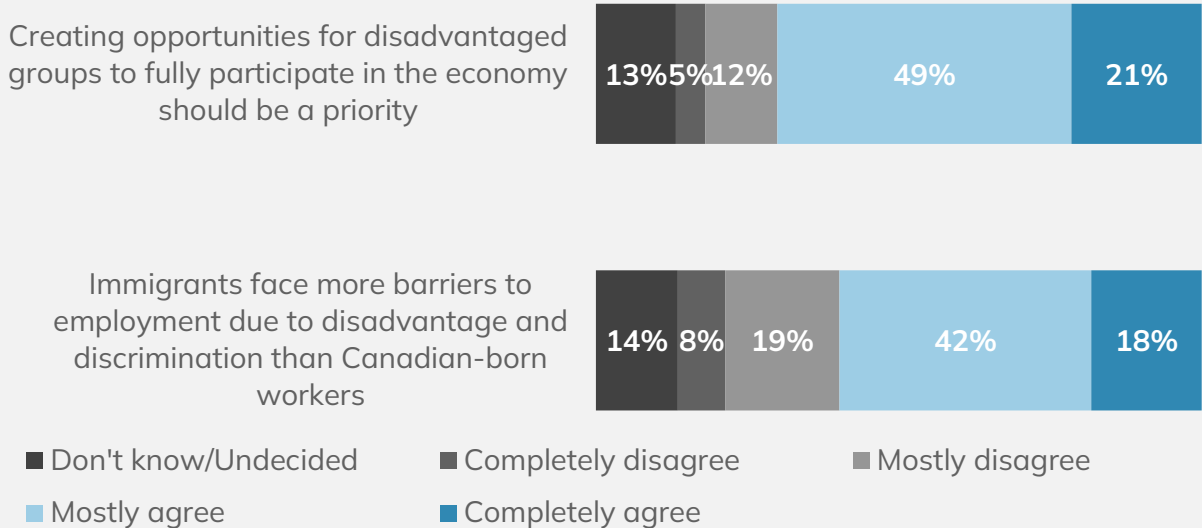
According to a Leger poll run for the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) in October 2021 (see **Figure 1** for details):<sup>15</sup>

- 70% of Canadians agree that creating opportunities for disadvantaged groups to fully participate in the economy should be prioritized as the economy recovers from the pandemic; and
- 60% of Canadians agree that immigrants face more barriers to employment due to disadvantage and discrimination than workers born in Canada.



**Figure 1.**

**As Canada's economy recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (n=1,728)\***



\*Numbers may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: Leger Marketing Inc. and TRIEC (2021)

The significance of employment goes beyond the economics and financial wellbeing of immigrants. For many, work confers a sense of purpose, self-respect and meaning. Therefore, the underutilization of immigrant talent, characterized by insecurity and career setbacks, undermines personal dignity and worth. Moreover, the economic integration of immigrant professionals devoid of inclusivity and respect hurts social cohesion, leading to poor health, a lack of life satisfaction and weak retention of immigrants.<sup>16</sup>

### **Employers face difficulties in talent recruitment and retention**

Unemployment and underemployment among immigrants coincide with acute labour shortages in the Canadian economy. Despite hiring difficulties, companies are not tapping newcomer talent. In a 2021 study by the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC), about 55 per cent of small- and

medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Canada reported difficulty hiring workers, while 26% were challenged to hold on to talent.<sup>17</sup> Yet the same study finds that just 10% of SMEs hired immigrants or “foreign” workers when facing labour shortages in the 12 months prior to the survey.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Towards a new reality***

Better strategies to integrate international talent into the workforce can help to bridge the divide. Already an important part of Canada's labour supply, immigrants are more likely to work in occupations projected to grow compared to the workforce average.<sup>19</sup> Charting a course towards prosperity for all requires better employment outcomes for immigrants, and is only possible if we understand how evolving labour force conditions may affect immigrant labour market integration.

# About this report

The purpose of this report is not to predict workforce and workplace changes coming over the horizon. The pandemic has shown that it is difficult to know what will happen one year ahead, let alone decades. Instead, this report compiles and presents information on emerging and established trends identified through a secondary scan of available grey literature, academic journals, online news sites and social media. Available sources of evidence were reviewed, coded and grouped into six major trends, followed by an issue-centred scan to deep dive into selected topics. This report captures trends that are relevant to the future of immigrant labour market outcomes, and have implications for immigrants, employers and policymakers.

Maturity Level	
Emerging trends:	Established trends:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Likely to shape the future of immigrant workplace integration</li> <li>Limited data and evidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly likely to shape the future of immigrant workplace integration</li> <li>Robust data and evidence</li> </ul>



## Current situation and future trends

A new vision for the future workforce is still coming into focus. What is certain, however, is that the below trends will factor into how it shapes up. The sections that follow outline current perspectives on each of these trends and how they relate to the labour market integration of immigrants.

1.	Automation, artificial intelligence and workforce transformation	Established
2.	Location-free, flexible work environments and job polarization	Emerging
3.	A new on-demand workforce of free agents (gig workers, freelancers)	Emerging
4.	Transferable skills and life-long learning over credentials	Emerging
5.	End of retirement as we know it	Emerging
6.	Towards a just and inclusive workforce	Emerging



# 1. Automation, artificial intelligence and workforce transformation

## Where are we today?

There have long been concerns that the adoption of new technologies threatens to displace or disrupt workers. One study finds that, in 2016, 10.6% of Canadian workers were at high risk of automation-related job transformation and 29.1% were at moderate risk.<sup>20</sup> Automation will not affect all occupations or industries evenly. Work that demands a high degree of creativity and innovative thinking will be more difficult to automate. Jobs that are repetitive, rules-based and do not require ‘soft skills’ are vulnerable.

It can take decades to go from technical feasibility to full adoption.<sup>21</sup> Even so, Canadian enterprises lag global counterparts in technology and skills investments for deployment.<sup>22</sup> A 2021 BDC study found that only one in four Canadian SMEs have fully automated at least one business function.<sup>23</sup> In comparison, a 2020 global survey by McKinsey & Company found that 31% of companies worldwide have been successful in fully automating at least one function.<sup>24</sup>

Similar results exist when it comes to embedding artificial intelligence (A.I.) into organizational strategies. While automation seeks to collate data and perform repetitive tasks, A.I. is designed to understand patterns, learn from experience and select the most appropriate responses in given situations. According to a 2019 Deloitte survey, 25% of executives from Canada say they embed A.I. into their products and services, the lowest of all surveyed countries.<sup>25</sup> And 68% of organizations in Canada focus on external sources of talent to enhance their A.I. talent pool instead of training their workforces — which is higher than any other country.<sup>26</sup>



Changes in worker supply can influence the pace of technology adoption. Some studies have found that “high-skilled” immigration (defined as having at least four years of post-secondary education) can contribute to technology adoption,<sup>27</sup> while “low-skilled” immigration contributes to slower adoption of technologies.<sup>28</sup>

## What’s changing?

### **Digitization and job automation**

Two key drivers of automation by businesses in recent years, besides optimizing productivity, have been the COVID-19 pandemic and perceived labour shortages:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed many businesses to digitize operations and/or install automating technologies to minimize physical contact. Some jobs lost during the pandemic (e.g., salespersons, janitorial and building maintenance workers, food service workers) may never return and industries such as retail may be forever transformed.<sup>29</sup> The pace of automation, however, may slow if resources for further capital investments are limited.
2. In the face of labour shortages, a 2021 BDC report highlighted that companies that adopt new technology and automation are twice as likely to find hiring easy. About 61% of businesses that adopted new technologies and automation found it very easy or somewhat easy to hire. Businesses were equally likely to automate work processes (e.g., using robotics, cognitive agents, smart workflows, or advanced analytics) to address labour shortages (10%) as they were to recruit immigrants and/or foreign workers (10%).<sup>30</sup>

Previous predictions that automation would lead to mass unemployment have not manifested but some futurists anticipate that the coming years could be different. A C.D. Howe Institute study estimates that one in five Canadian workers are in jobs that could

theoretically be automated by 2028.<sup>31</sup> The same study showed that immigrants face a similar average risk from automation as other workers in Canada.<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, because racialized new immigrants are overrepresented in entry-level positions and low paying industries, such as hospitality, manufacturing and warehousing, they will be at greater risk of displacement due to increased automation.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, given their employment profile, immigrants could have a small advantage in natural and applied science occupations, which are expected to grow in the next decade.<sup>34</sup>

### **A.I. in human resource management**

Another way in which new technology may affect immigrant labour market outcomes is its application in human resource (HR) management systems. Increasingly, A.I. is being used to determine compatibility during the hiring process (e.g., resume screening based on keywords or work history, predictive job interview tools to analyze facial or behavioural cues, etc.). What this means for equity-deserving groups is not fully known. There is potential for algorithms to pass on institutionalized discrimination against workers who may appear different from the benchmark set by developers, testing on non-diverse samples and using data with built-in historical prejudices<sup>35</sup> — i.e., “bias in, bias out”. On the flip side, an American study showed that algorithms can result in the selection of unconventional candidates, such as those without job referrals, who lack prior experience, who have non-traditional credentials and who graduated from “non-elite” colleges.<sup>36</sup>



In other words, the algorithms may be less biased than the people who create them as machine learning has the potential to curb bias if done right. If A.I. is applied in ways that are unbiased, accountable and transparent, it could bring efficiency to the hiring process and benefit groups that have historically been discriminated against, including immigrants.

### **A.I. and immigration**

A.I.-based tools can affect immigrants in ways other than job recruitment. The Government of Canada has been experimenting with A.I. since at least 2014. Advanced data analytic tools can help improve the efficiency of processing routine immigration cases and reduce backlogs. But these tools may also create new biases and barriers, and their accuracy depends on data quality. In the United Kingdom, for example, a campaign against the use of a decision-making algorithm claimed to introduce bias and racial discrimination into the immigration system was successful in getting it dropped by the Home Office ahead of a court case.<sup>37</sup>

Predictive analytics tools are also being used to develop recommendations on where immigrants should settle. The GeoMatch tool developed by Immigration Policy Lab researchers, for example, recommends locations where future newcomers are likely to find economic success based on previous immigrants' employment and education profiles.<sup>38</sup> A.I.-powered platforms such as this may eventually allow immigrants to choose their destinations based on their professional credentials and background — further intensifying the global war for talent. Developed economies, such as the United States, Germany, Finland and Belgium are revamping policies to attract talent in the midst of labour shortages and to support pandemic recovery.<sup>39</sup> Even Japan, which has been historically averse to immigration, has been exploring allowing workers on five-year visas to stay indefinitely and bring their families.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, Canada's competitors for international talent are expanding to

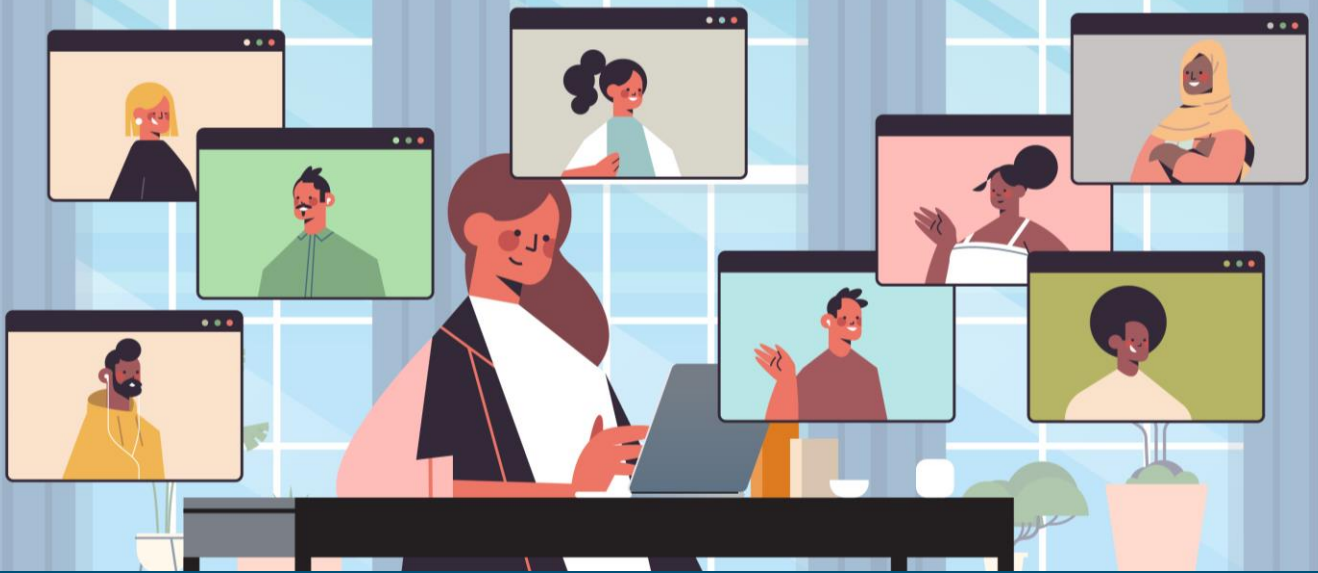
rapidly developing economies, where economic opportunities are abundant.<sup>41</sup> Countries like India and China, which have been important source countries for immigration to Canada, have been incentivising talent to return.<sup>42</sup> If policy reforms in other countries or regions offer a better package for top global talent, Canada could lose out.

### **What can we do now?**

- Invest in reskilling programs that deliver clear pathways to new work for displaced workers, while leveraging immigrant talent to fill skills gaps and take advantage of productivity-enhancing technologies.
- Give workers the right to demand transparency in the decisions and outcomes of A.I. systems, including the algorithms that underly them. For employers and governments, this means ensuring that a process is in place for appealing decisions and having them reviewed again in an open and timely way. For example, in November 2021, New York City passed a bill requiring employers to disclose to job candidates if A.I. was used in the recruitment process, providing some level of transparency for why they were not hired.







## 2. Location-free, flexible work environments and job polarization

### Where are we today?

COVID-19 has magnified the trend of job polarization in Canada. While the pandemic has proven that some jobs can be done from anywhere, working from home and flexible schedules are not options for everyone.<sup>43</sup> One year into the pandemic, only about one in three Canadian workers (32%) held jobs that could be done remotely, up from 4% in 2016.<sup>44</sup> The potential for remote work is not determined by occupations; it is contingent on tasks and activities.<sup>45</sup> Activities that require fixed equipment (e.g., machinery, lab equipment), physical or manual activities cannot be done remotely. While many office workers safely switched to work-from-home during the pandemic, other workers were laid off or had to risk infection to continue earning an income.

Statistics Canada data shows that proportionally more women than men and more immigrants than those born in Canada moved to teleworking during the pandemic.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, immigrant workers (44%), especially recent immigrants (60%), are more likely than those born in Canada (36%) to worry that working from home will negatively impact their careers.<sup>47</sup> This might be because

reduced visibility from teleworking may have particularly severe effects on newcomers who have not yet formed strong bonds with others. The workplace is a key pillar in helping newcomers settle and adapt to life in their new home. With continued remote work, recent immigrants to Canada may face challenges forming connections that help them advance in their roles. Remote work also means social isolation. Since the pandemic, average life satisfaction declined more among immigrants from some regions (e.g., Asia, Oceania, Europe, US) than among people born in Canada.<sup>48</sup>

### What's changing?

Remote work is likely to stay,<sup>49</sup> giving some employees the option to work from an office, their home or other space. Several companies, such as Shopify, have made the switch to long-term remote or hybrid work, but, in Canada and globally, the numbers vary by industry.<sup>50</sup> In the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), employers in professional, scientific and technical services and the wholesale trade sectors are more likely than those in other sectors to expect a hybrid work model for the future.<sup>51</sup> Employers were also more likely to express concerns about remote

work (e.g., maintaining organizational culture, onboarding new employees) than to identify benefits.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to remote or hybrid work arrangements, flexible working (when and where) is becoming key to attracting and retaining top talent. Work is increasingly not just location-free but also time-free. Policies on flexible work schedules introduced by some employers during COVID-19 partly to allow employees to balance work and care responsibilities may persist.

Many employees may not be willing to go back to long commutes and long hours that defined the pre-COVID norm. According to Statistics Canada, 80% of surveyed new teleworkers said that they would like to work at least half of their hours from home even post-pandemic.<sup>53</sup> Others who thrive in a collaborative setting and crave face-to-face social interaction may not want to work from home. In the United States, workers may already be self-selecting into organizations whose remote and flexible work plans match their demands.<sup>54</sup>

### **Talent recruitment and tele-migration**

As employers become more adept at managing virtual and geographically dispersed teams, they must recalibrate recruitment strategies. Residence in a specific country or city may be less of a consideration in hiring than time zones. Cross-border hiring, if supported by changes to employment eligibility laws, may increase as employers become more comfortable with remote teams.<sup>55</sup> E-residency programs to welcome global entrepreneurs and workers may dissuade business immigration.

Workers may also engage in freelance work, or “tele-migration.”<sup>56</sup> In 2014, almost two-thirds (63.8%) of respondents to a global survey conducted by the Boston Consulting Group and The Network said the idea of moving to another country for work appealed to them. But willingness to move abroad has been on the decline, dropping to 57.1% in 2018 and 50.4% in 2020. To some people,

getting the benefit of international work, without having to relocate may be the ideal option.<sup>57</sup>

A new era of hybrid or remote work will mean that jurisdictions will no longer need to compete for companies by incentivizing them to come and bring jobs. Employees will not be tethered to where their employer is located. Tax incentives may target individuals rather than large employers. In the United States, cities like Topeka and Tulsa are already offering remote employees up to \$15,000 to relocate.<sup>58</sup> Here in Canada, provinces such as Newfoundland have marketing campaigns to attract remote workers.<sup>59</sup>

### **Fairness in a hybrid workplace**

The new challenge for employers will be fairness in a hybrid set up. Given the productivity debates (see **Box 1**), employers may not see office workers and remote workers as equivalents. In a Gartner survey, 64% of managers believed that in-office workers perform better than those who work from home, and were more likely to give office workers a higher raise than remote workers.<sup>60</sup> This does not bode well for women in particular. Surveys suggest men are likely to return to their workplace in greater numbers than women.<sup>61</sup> If managers hold a bias towards in-office workers, women may be at a disadvantage for promotion and career progression, worsening the gender-wage gap — which is already severe for racialized immigrant women.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, while remote work can be a competitive advantage, attracting professionals who want more flexibility, working mothers and international talent,<sup>63</sup> it can also have a downside for these workers.



## Box 1.

### The remote work productivity debates

- **Remote workers are more or equally productive as in-office workers:** According to some reports, worker productivity increased during the pandemic. Data collected in 2019 and 2020 by Gartner showed that full-time remote workers were 5% more likely to be high performers than full-time in-office workers.<sup>64</sup> And a PricewaterhouseCoopers survey of over 850 CFOs in 24 countries revealed that productivity levels remained relatively stable from March to May 2020.<sup>65</sup>
- **Productivity gains from remote work are not sustainable:** Productivity gains from remote work may be short-lived if employee burnout and anxiety are not managed.<sup>66</sup> A survey conducted by ADP Canada and Angus Reid revealed that many Canadian remote workers feel less engaged with their work since the start of the pandemic and stress levels were on the rise.<sup>67</sup> Innovation, which requires co-creation and collaboration, may also suffer as more work becomes remote.<sup>68</sup>
- **Resilience over efficiency:** Some experts advocate for a shift in importance from organizational efficiency to resilience.<sup>69</sup> This may benefit immigrants, if recognized by employers. It takes a significant amount of courage to immigrate, whether voluntary or forced. This in-demand soft skill is something that immigrants have in abundance.

Remote workers may have more freedom of choice of location but less control over work conditions, their wages and social protection. If people who work remotely have limited say in their working conditions, the quality of professional life could deteriorate.

Organizations that outsource work would not pay local income taxes or contribute to social security. They may also be exempt from existing labour standards. Some US tech companies like Google, Facebook and Twitter are already paying different rates to employees who switch to permanent remote work and those who commute to the office.<sup>70</sup>

#### ***Social polarization based on work arrangements***

Social polarization between people who have flexible work arrangements and people who do not may lead to tensions over the longer term.<sup>71</sup> About 83% of those with a university degree were working from home compared to just 35% of those with a high school education or less.<sup>72</sup> Social divisions are closely linked to employment that defines individuals' identities and opportunities. In general, the working-class are essential

workers (e.g., food processors, transit workers, sanitation workers, etc.) who generally have little control over their work conditions, low pay and insecurity.

The middle-class accounts for 58% of Canada's population, according to OECD calculations.<sup>73</sup> A 2017 poll done for Maclean's found that 70% of Canadians (68% of Ontarians) self-identify as middle class,<sup>74</sup> undercounting the "working class." Class division and consciousness have not been a big part of Canadian discourse in the past.<sup>75</sup> But the COVID-19 pandemic has created an "at-home" class partially sheltered from the health and economic crises, and a class of precarious workers (e.g., Uber drivers, retail workers, etc.) who cater to shelter-at-home workers. These divisions and reckoning about inequality may fuel populist sentiments. Pretending we are all middle class ignores the struggles of vulnerable workers in precarious jobs.<sup>76</sup> Class divisions may make Canada an undesirable destination for immigrants who perceive a lack of equality and social mobility.

## What can we do now?

A thriving and fair hybrid or remote work culture will be an important factor in the global competition for talent. To compete successfully for immigrant talent requires a considered focus, both in attracting talent to move to Canada and to work for Canadian companies. Employers must find new ways to establish company culture, emphasizing inclusion, supporting the evolution of workplace social skills and enabling the transfer of tacit knowledge, collaboration and innovation. The companies that have experienced higher productivity during the pandemic were those that supported continued interactions among colleagues, including for coaching, mentoring, networking and sharing ideas.<sup>77</sup> These are the very cornerstones to immigrant integration and retention. Other challenges that must be addressed to improve the situation for all workers, including immigrants, are:

- Promoting fairness and transparency in hybrid environments
- Instilling an inclusive and empathetic culture
- Increasing social interactions and one-on-one meetings with direct reports to avoid demoralization
- Redesigning hiring and onboarding processes to consider the hybrid world





### 3. A new on-demand workforce of free agents (gig workers, freelancers)

#### Where are we today?

Musicians, artists, freelance writers, trades contractors and other on-demand workers have long been employed on the basis of temporary, occasional or uncertain gigs. Digitization, however, has expanded this model to other types of work. The category of gig work has gained greater attention during the COVID-19 pandemic as more Canadians have become aware of the lives of essential workers. While there is no widely accepted definition of the gig economy, it generally covers non-standard work arrangements, such as independent contractors and freelancers (e.g., graphic designers, computer programmers, rideshare drivers, food couriers), where workers are employed and paid per project or task. Job tasks are typically mediated through online platforms and crowdsourcing marketplaces.

About 48 million people around the world are registered on labour matching websites, representing a \$4.4 billion market for online freelancing (e.g., tax preparation, software development).<sup>78</sup> A 2021 Payments Canada survey found that more than one in three (37%) businesses in Canada employ gig

workers.<sup>79</sup> Given differences in definitions and data sources, consensus on the total size of the gig economy in Canada does not exist. Available estimates range from 3.5% to 13.0% of the labour force.<sup>80</sup> One study estimates that the share of gig workers in the economy has been slowly growing, from 5.5% in 2005 to 8.2% in 2016.<sup>81</sup> By the same estimate, the increase was seen for both women (from 6.2% in 2005 to 9.1% in 2016) and men (from 4.8% in 2005 to 7.2% in 2016), and was driven by a growth in gig workers who earned no wages or salaries as well as those who combined gig work with wages or salaries.<sup>82</sup> Past growth in gig workers may be due to the 2008-09 financial crisis<sup>83</sup> and the proliferation of online platforms (2012-13).<sup>84</sup> Due to a COVID-19 pandemic-induced rise in demand for delivery services (given lockdown measures), the need to support livelihoods during periods of job scarcity, and a cultural shift towards an independent work lifestyle, the size of the gig economy may be further expanding.

Though the gig economy is most visible in urban centres of Canada, there are signs of expansion into smaller or rural communities.

Data to understand the full extent of gig work in rural settings is limited, but evidence from rent-seeking platforms suggests that 28% of all Airbnb revenue is generated in four rural areas of Canada.<sup>85</sup>

Not all gig workers see their jobs in the same way. While some people choose to work gig jobs because of the increased flexibility and the freedom it affords,<sup>86</sup> others do it due to lack of alternatives. About three in five gig workers globally say this type of work provides them with extra money and flexible hours.<sup>87</sup> The results were consistent across gender, age cohorts, type of work and countries.<sup>88</sup> In Canada, a 2017 BMO Wealth Management survey found that 49% of all respondents (spanning different generations) work in Canada's gig economy to have autonomy and control and to make extra money on the side.<sup>89</sup> Professionals who make the move from full-time roles to freelancing fall into this category. Gig work may be the primary job or a way to supplement income from a main job.

For about two in five gig workers globally, this type of work arrangement is their only alternative for earning a living.<sup>90</sup> Some workers look for gig work after losing regular employment earnings or not being able to secure quality, full-time standard work.<sup>91</sup> According to a study by Bank of Canada staff, 37% of gig workers in Canada took on tasks or gigs to make an income after a job loss or reduced hours or wages.<sup>92</sup> The same study found that weak economic conditions motivated over one-third of respondents who took part in informal work and more than half would move to formal employment with no increase in pay. For the most part, gig work is a temporary activity, with about half of those who entered gig work in a given year not having gig income in the next year.<sup>93</sup> A quarter of gig workers, however, spent three or more years doing this type of work.<sup>94</sup> For these workers, gig work may entail a loss of dignity at work, financial insecurity and a lack of career progression.

Racialized Canadians and new immigrants are over-represented in precarious gig

work.<sup>95</sup> About 10.8% of male immigrant workers who had been in Canada for less than five years were gig workers in 2016, versus 6.1% of male Canadian-born workers.<sup>96</sup> For immigrants, gig work may be a first step into the labour market. Due to the devaluation of international credentials and other barriers, many immigrants may land low-wage, precarious work to generate income while looking for jobs in their fields of expertise. Gig work can help immigrants get a foothold in new jobs and careers in Canada. But newcomers may be particularly vulnerable in a gig work environment, where they are not aware of their labour rights.

Coordinated policy action to address the challenges and opportunities of gig work has so far been limited in Canada. Being misclassified as independent contractors is a major driver of risks to these workers. It removes workers from many occupational health and safety protections, such as the right to refuse unsafe work, and other minimum labour standards.

## What's changing?

### *For workers*

The gig economy — precipitated by technology, human capital and a cultural shift towards collaboration and flexibility — will continue to evolve and grow. Advancements in digital technology will increase the number of online marketplaces, the unbundling of jobs into tasks, open-source talent sharing and opportunities for freelancers to bid for work and take on employment contracts in any country. It will also enable workers to have both an employer and a side hustle. Meanwhile, a shift in values favouring “freedom and choice” versus “security and loyalty” may mean portfolio careers, part-time positions and gig work become the norm over time.<sup>97</sup> Future workers may have many different employers at the same time, rather than being in full-time work with one single employer.<sup>98</sup> They may increasingly design their own careers, signing up only for tasks they are interested in completing within a given timeframe.

For new immigrants, gig work can continue to provide a point of entry into the Canadian labour market, provided that it does not reproduce inequality. At the same time, global gig work may mean that citizenship becomes fluid, with civic identity, rights and obligations re-defined. The supply of immigrant professionals may decline as moving no longer becomes imperative for seeking new employment opportunities. One European study notes that high-skilled and high-demand professionals can leverage the gig economy for higher incomes through global access to opportunities.<sup>99</sup> To continue to attract immigrants to the country, governments and business may need to emphasize the quality of life that is a benefit to living in Canada.

Policy protections can prevent gig work from entrapping workers, including immigrants. In the absence of minimum standards for non-traditional workers around compensation, sick leave and other benefits, the growth in precarious forms of gig work may widen inequality in Canada. Even when deemed “essential,” gig workers typically are not on payroll, have few workplace rights, enjoy limited access to benefits (e.g., paid leave, health insurance), face inconsistent and uncertain hours and struggle with career advancement.

A union or body to represent gig workers is one regulator consideration. The Canadian Supreme Court has recognized the right of Uber drivers to unionize. Ontario’s Labour Relation Board ruled that Foodora couriers are dependent contractors and eligible to unionize. I Lost My Gig, an advocacy group, has called for Ontario to consider universal basic income to protect gig workers. Control in the employer-worker relationship in an on-demand workforce may shift to the worker.<sup>100</sup> On the other hand, pressure to unionize could push employers to reduce or eliminate operations in Canada, taking jobs with them.

### **For businesses**

For businesses, gig work is an opportunity to move to a more efficient, agile workforce

(contract, temporary or freelance).<sup>101</sup> Employers are increasingly looking for more skills.<sup>102</sup> If organizations cannot reskill their existing workforces fast enough to meet changing needs, they may move to external recruitment and pay a premium for in-demand skills. If, in turn, employers progressively give more tasks to self-employed freelancers than to full-time employees, workers with outsourceable jobs could face downward pressure on wages. At the same time, employers may struggle to find workers to complete tasks seen as undesirable or to maintain a stable, full-time workforce.

### **What can we do now?**

- The limited knowledge about gig workers restricts the ability of policymakers to understand their experiences and develop evidence-based policy responses. More data is needed to better estimate the size and composition of the gig economy and the needs of its workforce, including the impact this will have on immigrant integration and the threat of perpetuating underemployment of this group.
- Many gig workers are considered “essential” but they bear all the risk.<sup>103</sup> As noted, immigrants are vulnerable to this type of work. New policies and protections from governments are needed to ensure fair pay and benefits for workers in this on-demand economy.
- Immigrants who choose to enter platform work may do so because they feel they have no other option. Regulating the platform economy should be done alongside addressing the systemic causes that hinder immigrants’ economic integration process.





## 4. Transferable skills and life-long learning over credentials

### Where are we today?

About 59% of Canadians aged 25–64 years achieved tertiary qualification in 2019, the highest rate among OECD countries.<sup>104</sup> However, earnings premiums for tertiary education are lower in Canada than the OECD average.<sup>105</sup> Degree inflation due to technology spread and the changing nature of jobs may be partly responsible for this phenomenon.<sup>106</sup> Employers may ask for post-secondary degrees in jobs that do not necessarily require one, in part because they do not understand the needed competencies of today's workforce. Jobs today may have the same titles as before but require different skills. Rather than articulating the critical skills needed, employers may be using a bachelor's degree (from a recognized university) as a weak proxy for proficiency.

This despite university graduates in Canada themselves recognizing gaps in their applied skills. A Statistics Canada report showed that 14% of people who have a bachelor's degree or higher end up going to college after university.<sup>107</sup> For example, a university

graduate with a bachelor's of science may take a nursing program at college. College programs are also popular among internationally-educated newcomers who are looking for Canadian certification.

Recent immigrants to Canada are, on average, more highly educated than the Canadian-born population.<sup>108</sup> For immigrants, the devaluation of experience and credentials through both underemployment and reduced wages has been an enduring problem. Credentials provide employers with evidence of competence. But employers are less certain about the quality and relevance of credentials that are unfamiliar to them. So too are regulators. For instance, at the height of the pandemic, qualified internationally-trained health-care professionals could not contribute to the health care system because credentials are valued in the labour market over proven skills.<sup>109</sup> Tools to determine the talent of newcomers can provide options for successfully transitioning into roles aligned with their expertise.



## What's changing?

### **Skills-based approach to opportunities**

Job sites are getting more sophisticated and better at skills matching. For example, LinkedIn launched Skills Path in 2021<sup>110</sup> as a pilot initiative to help create a common skills taxonomy, identify the core skills for open roles and match qualified candidates to those roles. It helps to overcome both degree and network barriers, while growing the size of employer talent pools. Transferable skills, expertise and experiences may gain more importance than credentials, especially as cradle-to-grave careers lose currency. Combined with persistent labour shortages, employers may alter their recruitment strategies and increasingly reach out to previously overlooked workers,<sup>111</sup> including immigrants.

### **Employer responses to changing skills demands**

Digital literacy (i.e., ability to locate, assess and convey information via digital mediums) will continue to be important. But given the growing numbers of people with technical skills, employers may put a premium on what else workers can bring to a role, particularly coveted soft skills, such as creativity, collaboration, adaptability, communication, critical thinking, teamwork, self-leadership and empathy.<sup>112</sup> With a move to hybrid or remote workplace and declining in-person interaction that comes with it, workplace social skills will also evolve.<sup>113</sup>

Post-secondary institution priorities sometimes do not reflect market realities.<sup>114</sup> A study of Canadian post-secondary strategic plans showed that just over half identify social and emotional skills as an important part of student success and only one in five recognize these skills as a core part of learning.<sup>115</sup> In addition, employers have long noted the mismatch between traditional academic institutions and the 'real world' skills needed to do the job. In 2018, 14 large employers in the US, including Google, Apple, IBM and Bank of America, announced

that they would no longer require employees to have a college degree for every position. More and more employers are now developing their own training programs amidst a shift to emphasize proof of skills over degrees. Accenture, Salesforce, Microsoft and Google — which have employees in Canada — have created programs to upskill their workforces, complementing or even replacing traditional higher education.<sup>116</sup>

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is also growing in importance. This includes co-ops, internships, apprenticeships, practicums, fellowships and other employment-related experiential learning opportunities. Telus and the Royal Bank of Canada are among employers that emphasize work-integrated learning approaches, and initiatives such as the WIL Hub by the Business + Higher Education Roundtable (BHER)<sup>117</sup> will help other employers, including SMEs, to participate in WIL or expand existing programs. Deloitte research has found that involving business in the design of training programs will help ensure in-demand skills are developed.<sup>118</sup>

### **Lifelong learning and the rise of micro-credentialing**

Learning never ends. The days of one-time post-secondary education are over. The economy is dynamic and the types of skills needed in the labour market is ever-evolving.<sup>119</sup> According to the 2021 GTA employer survey conducted by the Peel



Halton Workforce Development Group, employers generally feel that their current employees require upskilling and that job candidates require both upskilling and reskilling.<sup>120</sup>

With the changing nature of in-demand skills, life-long learning will be critical to maintaining relevance. Increasingly, workers are seeking out courses, certifications or micro-credentials that fit specific interests and professional goals. In a platform or gig economy, credentials can help freelancers establish their professional personas and credibility. Micro-credentials, which offer credentialing and "proof" of specific skills, offer alternatives to degree and diploma programs. Given that micro-credentials are often at a more granular level than traditional certificates or degrees, they offer an alternative to in-depth skills testing.<sup>121</sup> They, therefore, have the potential to become more important than one-time professional accreditations. Together with virtual learning environments and massive open online learning courses,<sup>122</sup> globally recognized certificate programs could reach a larger pool of international students and reduce credential recognition challenges immigrants typically face.<sup>123</sup> Employers in the GTA generally feel that micro-credentials could help close the gap in a range of skills.<sup>124</sup>

According to the World Economic Forum, there has been a four-fold increase in the number of individuals seeking out opportunities for learning online through their own initiative since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>125</sup> However, many workers, including immigrant workers, struggle to find the money and time for training. A 2019 survey found that 63% of Canadians find lack of funds as a barrier to retraining, while 53% say the time commitment was a barrier.<sup>126</sup> And they are often not aided by their employers. Urgent day-to-day issues often detract from learning and development

activities. In the 2019 Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters Manufacturing Workforce Survey, when asked about funds spent per-employee on training, about 54% of respondents stated they spent less than \$300.<sup>127</sup> One study finds that racialized immigrants who work in the for-profit sector experience gaps in on-the-job training opportunities relative to other groups.<sup>128</sup>

### What can we do now?

- We need more data on the composition and distribution of skills across jobs and workers. A precondition for investments in needed skills is information about what skills are in demand. Labour market information in Canada, including a skills and competencies taxonomy, exists but is fragmented and not quickly incorporated in education and training decisions.<sup>129</sup> Organizations like the Future Skills Centre are already working towards identifying and sharing effective approaches to skills development.
- We need approaches to define, evaluate and develop in-demand skills, including soft-skills.<sup>130</sup> Without clear frameworks that give employers a way to approach their skills needs and accurately judge the ranking of candidates in recruitment, immigrants are open to continued discrimination on the basis of their lack of "Canadian experience." Complementing this, more effort needs to be made to educate and inform employers and industry associations on skilled individuals coming into Canada.





## 5. End of retirement as we know it

### Where are we today?

The case for increasing the integration of immigrants into the workforce rests in part on an aging workforce. The onset of the pandemic saw a delay in the number of retirements in Canada. Compared to 2019, retirements fell by 4% in 2020 and 16% in 2021.<sup>131</sup> Further, in a study by Edward Jones, Age Wave and The Harris Poll, 33% of Canadians who were planning to retire said that COVID-19 has caused them to think about retiring later.<sup>132</sup> Some analysts anticipate that the dip is short-term only and retirement levels will grow once the pandemic comes to an end.<sup>133</sup> Industries such as health care, construction and manufacturing may be particularly affected by a post-pandemic era surge in retirement.<sup>134</sup>

However, the average retirement age in Canada has been slowly trending upward since the late 1990s, from 60.9 years in 1998 (61.6 years for males and 59.8 years for females) to 64.4 years in 2021 (64.9 years for males and 63.8 years for females).<sup>135</sup> In 2021,

the participation rate of Canadians aged 55 and over was 37.3% (43.4% for males and 31.7% for females).<sup>136</sup> Among Canadians aged 65 and over, 14.0% (18.9% of males, 9.8% of females) were still in the workforce in 2021, more than half of whom were in full-time employment.<sup>137</sup> Further, a recent national business survey by CERIC and Environics Research found that executives were less concerned about losing senior employees to retirement in 2021 (21%) than they were in 2013 (32%).<sup>138</sup>



## What's changing?

The concept of retirement as a time for leisure may be no more.<sup>139</sup> More and more, retirement does not mean a complete end to work. Some baby boomers are staying in the workforce beyond the traditional retirement age of 65 years. In a 2015 Sun Life Financial survey, nearly one-third (32%) of Canadians said they expect to be working full-time at 66, and another 27% expect to be working part-time at 66.<sup>140</sup>

Key drivers of delayed retirement are as follows:

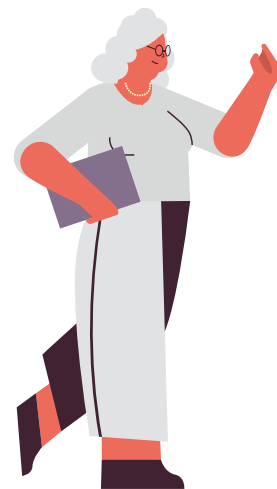
- Facing an aging workforce, declining birth rates and pending labour shortages, employers are thinking differently about talent sourcing. Some employers are offering phased retirement options. About 9% of SMEs in Canada say they looked to previously retired workers when facing labour shortages.<sup>141</sup>
- Views on work are shifting, as it is no longer seen just as a way to make an income. Work is how people derive personal purpose and meaning, and establish human connections. Those in the workforce beyond 65 years are motivated by purpose.<sup>142</sup> Aided by retraining programs, flexible, remote work and non-standard arrangements, older workers may stay in the labour force longer.
- Retirement is about financial freedom which is getting elusive for many. The average Canadian struggles to set aside what can be a high percentage of pre-tax income to have enough to live on for an undetermined number of years. A 2020 Scotiabank Retirement Survey found that 70% of Canadians worry that they are not saving enough for retirement.<sup>143</sup> The 2021 Natixis Global Survey of Individual Investors found that even individuals who are affluent and frequent savers are concerned that they will not be able to retire securely.<sup>144</sup>
- Low retirement savings cannot sustain

longer lifespans. The life expectancy of Canadians has been gradually increasing, with people born from 2018 to 2020 expected to live to 82.0 years (79.8 years for males and 84.1 years for females).<sup>145</sup>

Delayed retirement can have a cascading effect on the workforce. If senior people postpone retirement, it will be more challenging for employers to retain high performers at the mid-level who have fewer opportunities to move up. In addition, this could make it difficult for newcomers to enter the workforce at commensurate levels as overall there may be fewer opportunities.

## What can we do now?

- New approaches to reskilling and expanded employee accommodations will be needed to support Canadians working beyond the typical retirement age.
- More options for career development for junior and mid-level employees and newcomers, such as lateral moves rather than just promotions, could be provided.





## 6. Towards a just and inclusive workforce

### Where are we today?

Systemic racism, implicit bias and discrimination exist in Canada, including in the workplace. And, while equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) efforts have gained momentum over the past few years, measurable change remains elusive.

Amid the social justice movement of 2020 and the glaring disparities revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more people in Canada and globally are making activism part of their lives. For workers, whether a new or rising social consciousness and the upending of priorities due to the COVID-19 pandemic will lead to the “great resignation” or “big quit” in Canada is up for debate.<sup>146</sup> What is clear, however, is that employees increasingly want to work for organizations whose values align with their own. According to a Gartner survey, the number of highly engaged employees increased from 40% to 60% when their organization acted on social issues of the day.<sup>147</sup>

For employers, Black Lives Matter protests inspired the high-profile appointment of C-suite level EDI leads and the hiring of EDI

practitioners to deal with anti-racism, equity and wellness. Nevertheless, evidence of meaningful change as a result of employer efforts is hard to come by. See **Box 2** for details.

Increases to immigration targets signal that immigration matters to Canada as a policy tool. While the government selects who comes to Canada, employers influence who succeeds economically. Despite a points system used by governments to select qualified immigrants, newcomers are often still screened out of hiring processes and overlooked for advancement opportunities due to a perceived lack of “Canadian experience” or “cultural fit”.<sup>148</sup> This practice reflects the marginalization in labour market access for immigrants and, since 2013, has been recognized by the Ontario Human Rights Code as discriminatory.

The lack of measurable progress on EDI goals, or immigrant inclusion, is not surprising. The problems are deep and broad, requiring intentional actions and a long-haul commitment. Research shows that common EDI initiatives have been ineffective because:

## Box 2.

### EDI sentiments, commitments and (in)actions versus the results

Sentiments, commitments and (in)actions ...	The results ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 76% of Canadian investors think Canadian companies should set goals for more diversity in leadership.<sup>149</sup></li><li>• 69% of hiring decision-makers in Canada say their company has taken action to promote a more diverse and more inclusive workforce and work environment.<sup>150</sup></li><li>• 53% of Canadian employers say that they are updating their recruitment strategies to attract more diverse talent.<sup>151</sup></li><li>• 65% of Canadian employers say they do not have an EDI strategy in place.<sup>152</sup> Those with an EDI strategy have a focus on gender, age and ethnicity.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Osler, Hoskin &amp; Harcourt LLP's latest diversity report concludes that there is little progress on diversity at the executive officer level in Canada.<sup>153</sup> Immigrants are not considered in the study as a diversity group, but the report highlights a continued underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples, "visible minorities," women and persons with disabilities in leadership positions.</li><li>• Current data on immigrant representation at executive levels is unavailable but a 2019 TRIEC study estimated that only 6% of executives at GTA employers in the public, private and non-profit sectors were immigrants.<sup>154</sup></li></ul>

- Diversity hiring, or the reorganizing of people, does not automatically imply a culture of inclusion.<sup>155</sup> EDI is about shifting power and adjusting workplace norms. Simply increasing the representation of equity-deserving groups in organizations that continue to deepen inequality will have no effect.
- Initiatives sit only with human resources (HR) departments, which typically exist to avoid lawsuits and improve productivity. HR-focused EDI strategies often centre only on recruitment. When EDI policies are located only at centralized levels, they may lack accountability to workers.
- Initiatives often emphasize changing individuals instead of the places where they work — specifically, trainings and providing feedback to managers do not lead to a more diverse workforce as awareness does not prevent unconscious

bias, bias cannot be outlawed and trainings are often one-off, compliance-focused and concentrate on the feelings of the privileged group.<sup>156</sup> Studies suggest that diversity trainings have short-term effects and may even spark backlash instead of engagement.<sup>157</sup>

- Initiatives fail to include the impacts of intersectionality, resulting in people with multiple marginalizations feeling excluded.<sup>158</sup> New immigrants bring another layer of intersectionality. Policies and programs intended to reach diverse racialized or gender groups, for example, may not benefit them. Diversity needs to be managed in all its complexity.



## What's changing?

A workplace that is diverse and inclusive of immigrant talent will not emerge on its own. Employers need to make deliberate efforts to reach out to immigrant workers and other equity-deserving groups and seek to better understand and fully utilize their potential. Several trends are working in favour of a new reality where equity, diversity and inclusion for all are centred in workplaces.

### ***New generational pressures for employers to focus on equity, diversity and inclusion***

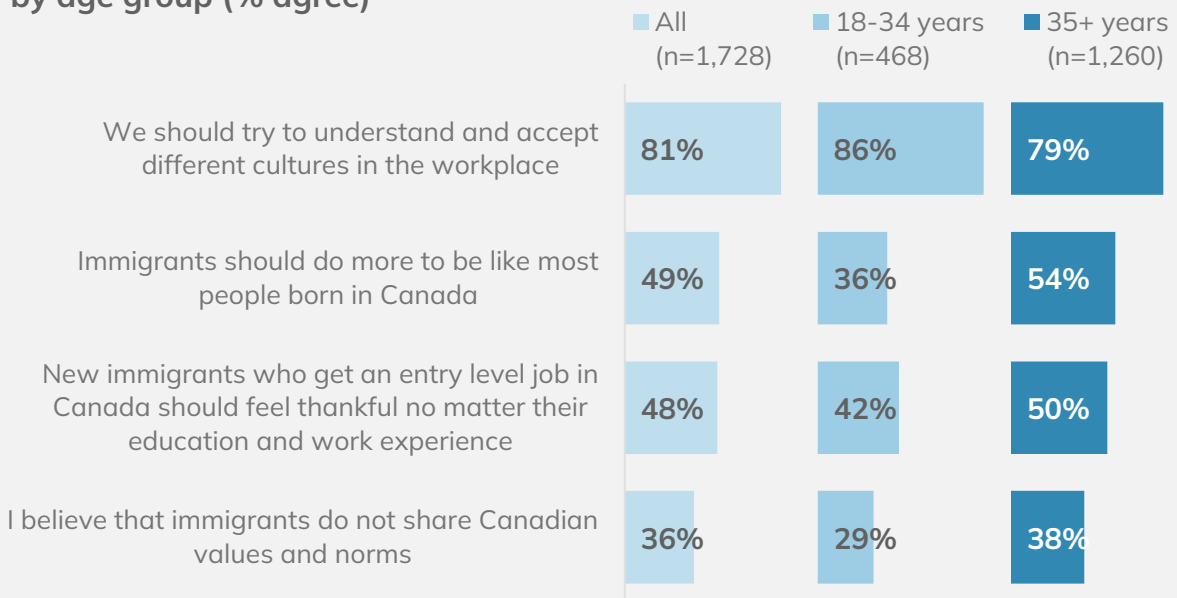
By 2030, Millennials and members of Generation Z will make up three quarters of the Canadian workforce.<sup>159</sup> They are part of the most educated and most diverse generation yet.<sup>160</sup> Diversity, ethics and values factor heavily in their career choices. Inclusion and belonging are not unfamiliar concepts to a new generation of workers for whom these ideas have been normalized.<sup>161</sup> The workforce will become more diverse in

future as the numbers of Generation Z'ers grow and Millennials transition into management roles. These workers could facilitate more accessible, inclusive and supportive workplace cultures.<sup>162</sup> As shown in **Figure 2**, young Canadians (aged 18 to 35 years) are significantly less likely than older Canadians (aged 35 years and above) to say immigrants should do more to 'fit in' and be thankful for any job they find regardless of education and experience.

With this generational shift, to remain competitive, employers will need to implement inclusive workplace policies that benefit all workers, including those who experience disadvantage. Businesses and regions known to have inclusive policies and programs may be more successful in attracting and retaining the young workers and global talent they need to win in the marketplace.

**Figure 2.**

### **Canadian public attitudes towards immigrant integration in the workplace by age group (% agree)**



Source: Leger Marketing Inc. and TRIEC (2021)

### ***Disclosure of salaries and transparency in organizational culture***

The Government of Canada's new pay transparency measures came into effect on 1 January 2021. Detailed salary data (e.g., hourly rate wages, bonus pay, overtime pay and hours worked) will be made public for the first time in June 2022 and wage gap information is expected to follow in Winter 2023. These measures only affect federally regulated workplaces with more than 100 employees, and data will relate to those equity-deserving groups recognized by the Employment Equity Act. Nevertheless, pay transparency due to legislation means that disadvantaged groups will have more power to push for equal pay and wage accountability.

Over time, if pay transparency goes beyond compliance and becomes normal business practice, even in unregulated sectors, it will be more difficult for employers to discriminate on the basis of gender, immigrant background or other factors. As wage gaps (or economic penalties for motherhood and migration) diminish, Canada may become particularly attractive for global talent.

In addition to transparency in salaries, transparency could increasingly extend to company culture. Websites like Glassdoor and Yelp and social media channels such as LinkedIn mean that what happens inside the organization no longer stays within the organization. Organizations with poor workplace cultures and leadership will find it difficult to keep the talent they have and attract new talent.

### ***Further evolution of the women's movement***

Leaders are starting to understand the obstacles that hold women back at work and a commitment to gender equality in Canada is strong.<sup>163</sup> But, globally, just 26% of straight, white men see obstacles to the advancement of racialized peoples, compared with 35% of employees in that group.<sup>164</sup> In addition, in Canada, recent immigrant women earn less for each dollar earned by non-immigrant women.<sup>165</sup> A

Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship report predicts that, based on existing trends, the women's movement could "evolve to better represent and advocate on behalf of all equity seeking groups" by 2030.<sup>166</sup> This could help to drive real change for immigrants and racialized peoples.

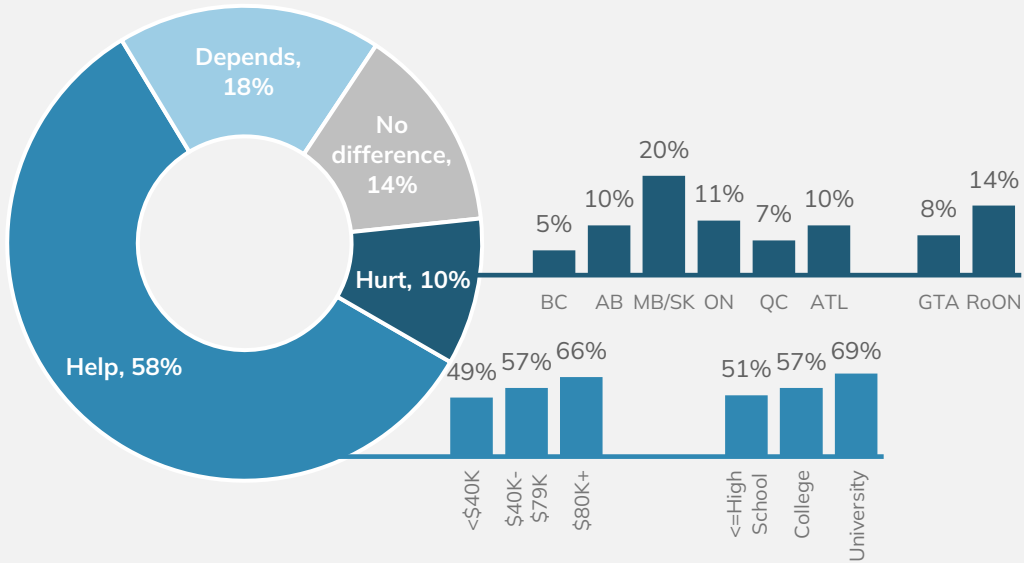
### ***Countertrends working against immigrant integration***

The ongoing digital transformation of the economy, fear of job losses and perceptions of unfairness by affected populations may fuel populist and nativist views in future.<sup>167</sup> Those who expect greater job losses from automation, or who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic, are more likely to hold negative views on immigrants and/or support government actions to restrict immigration.<sup>168</sup> This is consistent with a 2017 study that suggests a serious anti-immigrant movement in Canada is not impossible.<sup>169</sup> In a 2021 Leger poll commissioned by TRIEC, more than half (58%) of Canadians said immigrants help the economy, bringing needed skills to the labour market (61%) and adding diversity in Canada (46%). However, the remaining 42% of Canadians were equivocal or felt that immigrants hurt Canada's economy. Nearly one in three (32%) Canadians think that immigrants make no difference (14%) to the economy or that it depends (18%) on factors such as language, education and how hard they work. One in ten (10%) Canadians felt that immigrants hurt Canada's economy. The small proportion of the population who say that immigrants hurt the economy have contradicting reasons for holding such a view; about 60% of them say immigrants are a drain on government resources, while 58% of them believe immigrants take jobs from other Canadians. As shown in **Figure 3**, in some cases, public perceptions differ by region, income and education. These countertrends may work against immigrant inclusion in the workplace and society more broadly.

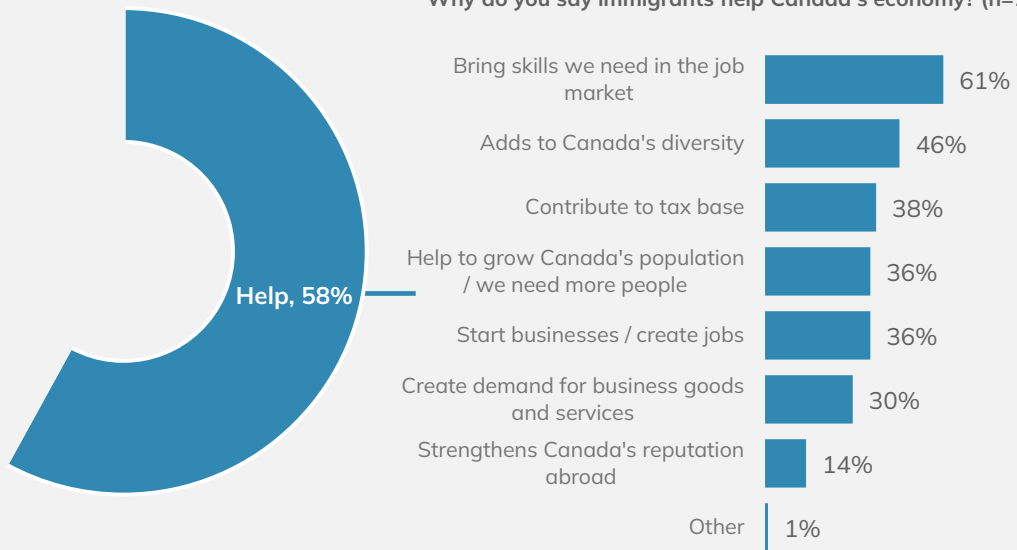


**Figure 3.**

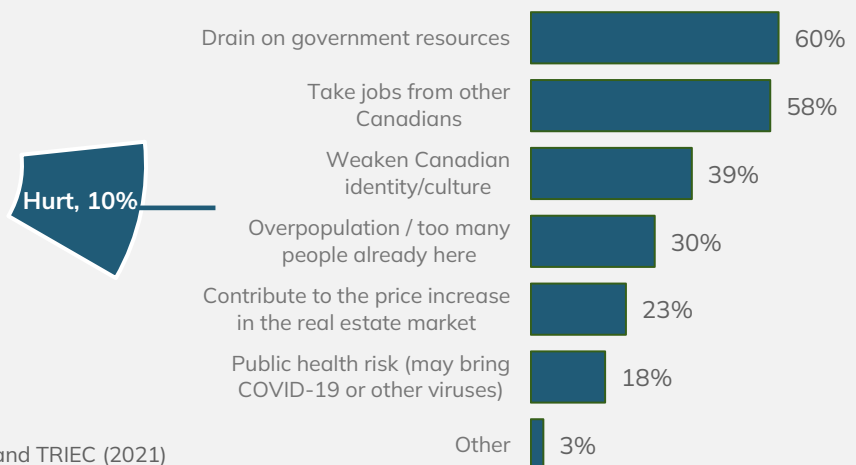
Do you think immigrants help or hurt Canada's economy? (n=1,728)



**Why do you say immigrants help Canada's economy? (n=1,047)**



**Why do you say immigrants hurt Canada's economy? (n=160)**



## Figure 3. (cont'd)

Do you think immigrants help or hurt Canada's economy? (n=1,728)



Source: Leger Marketing Inc. and TRIEC (2021)

### What can we do now?

Continuing to raise awareness and place the burden on people rather than institutions and organizations will not shift leadership structures or address issues of power and privilege. The right processes and deliberate action are needed to help reduce bias, increase diversity and generate benefits from these changes. For example, employers can:

- Reinforce unconscious bias training through the use of 'blind recruitment' to ensure opinions about job seekers are based on transferable work experience, competencies and education rather than other factors.
- Practice targeted recruitment rather than general outreach to boost diversity to find qualified candidates who are currently underrepresented, especially in senior management and executive ranks.
- Recognize that the process by which immigrants integrate into the Canadian workforce goes both ways. Studies show that it is the degree to which individuals adapt, or "enculturability," that predicts who stays and who leaves<sup>170</sup> — not necessarily initial perceived "cultural fit". All workers must further develop cultural competencies. Both newcomers and established populations must continually adjust and readjust.
- Support immigrant talent — as well as other underestimated groups — through sponsorship, mentorship and transparent, barrier-free pathways for career advancement.

# Conclusion

Immigration is key to the post-pandemic economic recovery. Competition for global talent will intensify. While Canada has been successful in attracting the best talent, we can do better when it comes to integrating them into the labour market and supporting their advancement. What we do today to support immigrant integration in the labour force will define not only their future prosperity but also Canada's.

While this paper complements existing research by highlighting how key trends on the future of work may affect immigrants, more needs to be done to create actionable pathways to change. Debate surrounding the evolving nature of work must acknowledge both the potential opportunities and threats for different equity-deserving groups, including immigrants. Actions must also go beyond workplace policies to look at the broader systems that define the labour market. We hope this paper will ignite more discussion to build a vision for the future of work that benefits immigrants and all Canadians.

***What we do today to support immigrant integration in the labour force will define not only their future prosperity but also Canada's.***



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**Toronto Region Immigrant  
Employment Council**

## About TRIEC

The Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) helps employers capitalize on the skills and experience of newcomers to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and helps newcomers secure work in their field of expertise.

In partnership with corporations, individual supporters, community organizations, and governments, we work to remove barriers to the labour market and to support the retention and advancement of newcomers in the workplace.

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