

# Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership - Employment Action Table Employment Research

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*Edmonton Local*  
**IMMIGRATION  
PARTNERSHIP**



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# Land Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that we are here in Edmonton, Alberta, on the traditional territory represented by Treaty 6 and Métis Nation Region 4. This is the traditional gathering place for Indigenous, Inuit and Metis Peoples including the Cree, Blackfoot, Nakota Sioux, Ojibway, Saulteaux, Anishinaabe, Dene, Iroquois, and many others, whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence our vibrant communities. We offer our gratitude to these Nations who were here first, for their care for, and teachings about, our earth and our relationships. May we honour the Peoples, and in reconciling our reality, live and embed the teachings that engender equity and dignity for all.

# Executive Summary

## Overview of the Project

In 2019, Edmonton City Council passed a motion directing City of Edmonton administration to provide an annual report on the state of immigration and settlement (SIS) in Edmonton. The first annual SIS report, *Belonging: Stories of the Dignity and Resilience of Immigrants*, was accepted by Council in fall 2021. In spring 2022, two consultants were contracted by City of Edmonton to conduct research on the theme of immigrant employment in order to inform the second annual SIS report.

The objectives of the research were:

1. To explore employers' efforts and best practices in hiring and inclusion of immigrants.<sup>1</sup>
2. To highlight the cultural wealth immigrants bring to the employment sector.

## Research Methods

- Qualitative data was collected through focus groups with a total of nine immigrant participants and through interviews with 12 employer participants representing nine employers from the private and not-for-profit sectors. The data was thematically analyzed using a recursive process of data review to develop data

<sup>1</sup> "Immigrants" is used throughout this report to refer to migrants, newcomers, refugees, and Temporary Foreign Workers.

<sup>2</sup> Ager, A. & A. Strang (2008). Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21(2), 166-191.

<sup>3</sup> Yosso, T.J. (2005). Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91.

codes and identify key themes.

- This research study is limited by the small sample size and, therefore, cannot be generalized. In addition, employers and immigrants were not linked to the same organization, therefore comments do not necessarily reflect the same employment context.

## Key Findings and Implications

- Findings of the study were analyzed with reference to Ager and Strang's model of social inclusion<sup>2</sup> and the Cultural Wealth Model<sup>3</sup> used by the City in the year one SIS report.
- The following key findings emerge from an analysis of the research data.
- Most employers do not have formal plans to hire immigrants, nor do they focus explicitly on hiring this group.
- When hiring immigrants, employers are primarily motivated by labour needs and to a lesser extent reputational concerns.
- Employers typically hire immigrants into entry-level positions.

- There is no evidence that employers' strategies to hire, retain, or promote immigrants are "best practices." There is some evidence for the success of equity, diversity, and inclusion strategies for the few employers who have plans and measurement systems in place.
- Employers and immigrants had different perspectives on employment systems and their workplace experiences.
- Employers value immigrants' aspirational capital, but that valuing does not translate into higher-paying jobs or promotion opportunities.
- Employers value immigrants' familial and social capital, especially if they are seeking employees and immigrants who can help spread the word. Information sharing amongst immigrants puts pressure on employers to have an inclusive workplace. Immigrants noted that without family or social networks to assist them, it is very difficult to find employment.
- Employers value immigrants' lack of resistance capital, evidenced in their positive attitude, lack of complaint, and lack of rights assertion in the workplace. Immigrants felt very vulnerable to retaliation and job loss if they raised concerns and did not feel safe speaking up.
- Employers emphasized the need for strong English language skills and also valued immigrants' linguistic capital, particularly if they had a diverse workplace and could marshal those language skills in onboarding others or resolving workplace issues. Immigrants noted

that without strong English skills, it is very difficult to find work, regardless of additional language capacities.

- Employers valued immigrants' navigational capital and saw this as building resilience that was also important in the workplace, but also noted that immigrants do not always understand Canadian employment norms. Immigrants noted that navigating the Canadian employment system is very difficult and they required family or social networks to assist them.

## Opportunities for Action

The following opportunities for action emerge from the research findings and implications:

### Additional Research

- Conduct further research to examine employer challenges and good practices for hiring and retaining immigrants. Research on the impacts of economic policies on immigrants would help to bring additional context to employers' practices.

### Supports for Immigrants

- Explore mechanisms, such as an information hub, to enable immigrants to obtain more/better information about the employment landscape in Canada before they leave their home countries.
- Develop and improve supports for immigrants' employment rights.



- Connect Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) to organizations that can support them.
- Explore the role of unions in ensuring equitable hiring and promotion of immigrants.
- Better connect immigrants to organizations that assist with finding work, particularly immigrants who may not have familial and social networks in Canada.
- Create paid internship programs for immigrants.

#### Supports for Employers

- Create and/or enhance, and widely promote, information for employers who are motivated to hire, retain, and promote immigrants.
- Partner employers with specific agencies that specialize in hiring of immigrants for a particular sector.
- Provide employers with information on the benefits of hiring immigrants and on demographics of immigrants (educational levels, professional qualifications, work experience in specific sectors, etc.).
- Create a network of immigrant-owned businesses to champion hiring immigrants and to support immigrant self-employment.
- Create a network of employers that hire immigrants and support them in sharing strategies for addressing challenges.
- Provide education for employers about equity as it relates to immigrant employees and other equity groups.
- Provide financial and other incentives for employers to hire immigrants (e.g., wage subsidy programs, free employer training, support when hiring immigrants).
- Provide support and incentives for employers to develop strategies and plans to hire immigrants.
- Develop a recognition program to celebrate employers who make efforts to recruit and retain immigrants.

#### Employer Accountability

- Create a mechanism for immigrants and other employees to report discrimination with a clear process to investigate these complaints and hold employers accountable.



# Project Overview

## The State of Immigration and Settlement

In 2019, City of Edmonton City Council passed a motion to direct City administration to provide an annual report on the state of immigration and settlement (SIS) in Edmonton.

The first annual report, *Belonging: Stories of the Dignity and Resilience of Immigrants*, was accepted by Council in fall 2021 and addressed the key themes of health and housing. The 2021 report was based on research grounded in two conceptual models:

1. The Multidimensional Immigrant Model, which views immigrants beyond the economic benefits they bring and more in terms of the multiple assets and strengths that immigrants harness to overcome systemic barriers in adapting to their new homeland.
2. The Cultural Wealth Model, which builds on this holistic approach and reveals the rich mosaic of cultural assets that immigrants bring to their new communities.

For the second annual report, the themes of employment and education were identified as priorities to explore. In spring 2022, two consultants were contracted by City of Edmonton to conduct research on the theme of immigrant employment. More specifically, guided by input from the Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (ELIP) employment table and the SIS Steering Committee, the City sought research on employers' practices and perspectives. The findings of this research will be used by the SIS

project team and professional writers to inform the development of the second annual report.

## Research Purpose and Objectives

Given that the barriers immigrants face in gaining well-paying and meaningful employment have been well documented, this research focused on exploring the barriers and supports for recruitment and retention from employers' perspectives.

The objectives of this research were:

- To explore employers' efforts and best practices in hiring and inclusion of immigrants in workplaces.
- To highlight the cultural wealth immigrants can bring to employment.

A further objective of this research was to develop a preliminary sense of employers' perspectives on immigrant employment in order to inform development of more fulsome research in the future.

## The Research Approach

The research was conducted using a systemic and intersectional lens that included attention to structures, systems, norms, and values that enable or constrain full and meaningful inclusion of immigrants in securing employment and experiencing inclusion in the workplace. The research approach recognized the presence and effects of interlocking systems of oppression that impact the lived and living experiences of immigrants in different ways, depending on their social location.

### Research Questions

The research was guided by two lines of inquiry:

1. What are the best practices<sup>4</sup> and barriers for employers in recruiting, retaining, and promoting immigrants? What strategies and supports might expand these practices or address these barriers?
2. What kinds of cultural wealth do immigrants bring to the organizations that employ them? What are the barriers to recognizing this wealth and how can these barriers be addressed?

### Inclusion Criteria

#### Employers

The researchers worked with a key contact at a local employment placement agency to identify employers for inclusion in the study. Based on extensive contact and work with employers in Edmonton, the key contact recommended employers that they believed were enacting promising or best practices related to immigrant employment. In particular, the researchers asked the key contact to recommend employers that:

- recruit and retain immigrants in high-quality employment, which could include:
- living wage or higher pay.
- employment linked to immigrants' credentials or qualifications.
- full-time, ongoing, secure employment.
- welcoming and inclusive employment environment.

- are engaged in efforts to institutionalize inclusion or anti-racism in organizational policies, programs, and practices for lasting impact.

#### Immigrants

The researchers worked with City staff and a community contact who had in-depth knowledge of and connection with immigrants in Edmonton to identify immigrants for inclusion in the study. A concerted attempt was made to ensure a variety of intersectional perspectives were reflected. Participants were included based on an assessment of such factors as: age, gender, racialization, immigration status, employment status, length of employment, and highest level of education. Other important factors, such as living with a disability and economic status, were also reflected in the research participants.

### Data Collection

Qualitative data was collected through interviews and focus groups with both employers and immigrants. Data was collected from a total of 21 participants.

#### Methods and Participants

Private sector and not-for-profit sector employers were included in the study. No public sector employers were included. This was due in part to the time constraints of the project and the complexity of securing approval to participate for contacts within public sector organizations. Employers varied in size and industry and a few were immigrants themselves, who established their own businesses in Canada. All employer contacts interviewed were involved in hiring, some were owner-operators, and some were human resource professionals.

Method	Number of Participants
Interviews with employers	12 participants (9 employers)
Focus groups with immigrants	9 participants

See Appendix B for interview and focus group questions.

In addition, the research incorporated findings related to employment from data collected to inform the City's review of the C529 Immigration and Settlement Policy.

### Data Analysis

Qualitative data was thematically analyzed using a recursive process of data review that included the following steps:

1. Review all data to get a general sense and tone of the findings.
2. Review data more carefully, identifying macro-level themes and sorting data.
3. Do a line-by-line reading of sorted data, identifying micro-level themes, sorting data, and reorganizing where needed.
4. Review the initial findings again to ensure alignment with all themes.
5. Begin writing, combining, eliminating, or reorganizing themes as required at this stage of analysis.

### Limitations of the Research

The research findings draw from a very small sample size and are, therefore, specific to the organizations and individuals involved. Findings, therefore, cannot be generalized to represent employers or immigrants in Edmonton.

It was outside the scope of this research to compare employer assertions and employee experiences within particular organizations or sectors. As a result, conclusions cannot be drawn about specific workplace cultures. In addition, participant numbers were not sufficient to compare the approaches and success of private and not-for-profit sector employers.



<sup>4</sup> As we learn how systems work to discriminate and how to mitigate oppression, practices and approaches change. We use the term “best practices” with recognition that the field of equity, diversity, and inclusion is constantly evolving.



# Findings

## Key Points from Relevant Literature

### Introduction

While much literature has explored the barriers to employment for immigrants and their experiences in the workplace, there is a limited amount of research that has explored the practices employers use for hiring, retention, and promotion of immigrants and the extent to which these practices are successful (Fang, Xiao, Zhu & Hartley 2022). When employers' hiring attitudes and practices have been reflected in literature, it is largely based on information from immigrant job seekers. Very few studies have been done from the employers' perspective (Liu 2007).

### Search Methods

The researchers identified academic and grey literature using a variety of search terms related to employers' perspectives and/or practices in the hiring of immigrants.<sup>5</sup> In total, 9 resources were identified for inclusion.

<sup>5</sup> Search terms included the following: Employer(s), AND actions, perspectives, practices, best practices, ideas, promising practices, strategies, approaches AND Hiring, hiring practice, hiring process, recruiting, employing, promoting, retaining, securing, employee selection AND Immigrant(s), Immigrant workers, refugee(s), newcomer(s), new Canadians. Limiters included: Canada or Canadian; 2000-2022; Academic journals and books; published in English; full text available.

	University of Alberta Libraries (all databases)	Google Scholar
# Identified	75	-----
Review Process	Title and abstract	First 15 pages of results, sorted by relevance
# Included	2	7

### Findings

One fairly comprehensive study by the Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia (2012) engaged over 150 employers in identifying effective practices, barriers and recommendations for hiring and retaining immigrants and refugees. Employers identified a number of effective practices, though the nature of these practices is not delineated in any detail nor was evidence of effectiveness is provided in the report. The following employer practices were identified:

- Soliciting recommendations from friends and current employees was described by employers as the most important way to recruit immigrants (20%). Job advertisements in newspapers and magazines and employer websites were the next most frequent means of recruiting (13.8%). Government employment centres and programs, professional recruiters and im-

migrant agencies were relatively low as recruitment options for employer respondents.

- One B.C.-based employer held on-site recruitment efforts in Germany, led by a German-speaking Canadian who promoted the employer to and worked with immigrants. The employer hired 300 workers.
- A Chamber of Commerce-initiated Living and Working Ambassadors Program was established to support prospective immigrants/foreign workers coming to Canada for an interview or after arriving to take a position. This program provided information, independent of the employer, during an orientation drive around the city. The program won an innovation award in British Columbia.
- One employer helped his family member get professional recognition of their credentials in a technology field. They also brought a technologist from Colombia through a provisional certification program and provided additional training and coaching to support full certification.
- Employers partnered to recruit skilled workers from Jamaica.
- One employer hired 30 seasonal workers through the TFW program, providing accommodation, medical services, and good pay. They have also rehired the same workers each year.

Employers also identified barriers to hiring immigrants and refugees, including:

- Immigrants' lack of strong English language skills.
- Immigrants' lack of Canadian experience.
- Employers do not know where to find skilled

immigrant candidates.

- The Federal Immigration Points System and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program process were barriers.
- Employers also want to see streamlining of the Federal Skilled Worker Program as well as improved pre-immigration screening in source countries.
- The difficulties of translating, evaluating, and assessing the equivalency of foreign credentials and qualifications, particularly for regulated occupations.
- Employers do not know how to navigate the plethora of information and resources on hiring immigrants.
- Employers in some rural B.C. communities felt they have little opportunity or capacity to attract immigrants and their families.

Chhinzer and Oh (2021) conducted survey-based research with hiring managers from 99 employers in a mid-sized Canadian city to identify employers' perspectives on barriers to and responsibility for workforce integration of skilled immigrants. Research findings demonstrate that employers typically rely on past experience to guide their assessment of immigrants' skills, rather than using assessment tools, and that they shift responsibility for workforce integration to government agencies and/or immigrants. The authors note that data indicates a mismatch between the high level of power employers have in the employment process and the low levels of responsibility that they assign themselves for ensuring integration of skilled immigrants in the workplace. As a result, employers may be systematically discriminating against skilled immigrants.

In another study, Fang, Xiao, Zhu, and Hartley (2022) surveyed 801 Atlantic Canada employers of varying sizes and from varying industries to gather

information on their attitudes about and experiences of hiring of immigrants and international students. Results of the survey include the following:

- Most employers held positive attitudes towards hiring immigrants.
- The main reasons employers who had hired immigrants and/or international students held overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward them were because they thought that those that they had hired were more hardworking than Canadian workers, skilled (though not always credentialed), and reliable.
- Employers' greatest concerns were immigrants' potential lack of English language proficiency, lack of Canadian work experience, cultural adaptation to the Canadian workplace, and high turnover.
- For employers who had hired immigrants before, 90% reported that they would like to hire immigrants in the next three years, and 75% of those who had not hired immigrants before reported that they would also like to do so.
- Employers are more likely to agree that immigrants can improve a firm's export opportunities. They did not believe immigrants worked for less pay than local workers.

Johnston et al. (2021) also examined employers' perspectives relative to students in their study. Employers in B.C., representing various-sized industries and organizations that hire co-op students, were identified. A random selection resulted in 29 employers being included in the study. Using "Q methodology," employers were asked to rank order a set of statements about hiring international students. The results were analyzed and identified four different perspectives on hiring immigrant students:

- One employer perspective is that qualifications are a key factor in hiring international students

and that diversity is an asset.

- A second employer perspective is that workplace integration of international students is challenging due to English language skills and cultural differences. For this reason, these employers prefer to hire domestic students.
- A third employer perspective emphasizes hiring students that can easily align with existing workplace cultures, possess strong English language skills, and have names that indicate a good fit with the organization. For this reason, these employers prefer to hire domestic students.
- The fourth employer perspective is that relevant work experience and credentials are most important to hiring, regardless of where the students come from. However, employers in this perspective also noted that when making hiring decisions they prefer relevant local work experience.

An additional student-focused study by Desai-Trilokekar, Thomson and El Masri (2016) was conducted through interviews and focus groups with 10 employers and 17 staff members at three Ontario universities. The researchers also collected data through observation of workshops and a job fair. The purpose of the research was to understand employer motives, perceptions, and practices and their interactions with universities in hiring international students to meet their labour market needs. Study findings revealed that neither universities or employers collect the data necessary to track international student employment. However, the researchers noted that employers are more willing to hire international students if they receive support. In addition, the researchers identified seven key trends or issues:

- Immigration policies and procedures create barriers for international students to gain em-

ployment and lead employers to see hiring this group as a difficult undertaking.

- Employer size, demand for skills, labour market need, and other factors impact their willingness to hire international students.
- Employers hire for both hard and soft skills. There is a need to shift the discourse on international students' soft skills from a deficit model to one of contribution.
- International students are viewed as different and this difference is not recognized for what it might contribute, but is seen through a deficit lens.
- Recruiters and hiring managers restrict their search to specific programs or universities, often the institutions they graduated from, which can exclude international students who do not appear similar to recruiters and hiring managers.
- Universities see delayed career preparation by international students as signals of poor planning. This needs to be reframed to recognize the barriers they face.
- There is opportunity to improve disaggregated data in order to better understand the barriers facing international students.

A study by Friesen and Ingram (2013) involved focus groups with 11 Canadian engineering employers to gather information about their experiences hiring immigrant engineers (IEs). The authors found:

- Overall, Canadian employers regarded IEs as highly motivated and eager to demonstrate their abilities, competence, and expertise.
- At the same time, employers noted differences between IEs and other engineers, particularly in the areas of culture and language, which

were identified as areas of challenge for workplace integration of IEs.

- Employers also identified IEs' difficulties with both written and spoken English as a significant challenge in workplace integration.
- Employers used strategies to navigate cultural differences with IEs, including adjusting their roles to focus more on technical duties and less on interacting with clients in order to mitigate communication challenges.
- Other strategies included using extensive written and interpersonal feedback mechanisms, group mentoring, and pairing IEs with Canadian-born employees.
- Some employers hosted social events to foster team-building, and used their own cross-cultural experiences as a reference point for supervising IEs.
- Employers who are experienced with IEs did not view IEs with a deficit approach and made fewer references to the need for supervision strategies. They also had a clear understanding that cultural differences could lead to different employee behaviours.
- Employers who are experienced with IEs also tended to reframe expectations of IEs. They noted that employers should expect differences and be prepared to have different onboarding and training supports in place for IEs, while simultaneously praising IEs' strengths.

An earlier review of literature by Liu (2007) examined studies that captured employers' perspectives, attitudes, and practices in hiring newcomers. Key findings of this study included:

- There is a disconnect between employers' perceptions of the assets held by new immigrants and the high levels of skills and education



assets that they actually possess. As a result of this disconnect, newcomers are often passed over in hiring.

- Employers prefer hiring strategies and approaches that are built on existing social networks and therefore largely exclude newcomer job seekers.
- Employers too often assess the attributes of newcomers using mainstream social and corporate cultural norms. As a result, newcomer job seekers are disadvantaged.

Liu concluded that employers need incentives and tools to support them in overcoming cultural bias in their hiring approach and their organizations. They also need information about Canadian immigration policy and the strategic advantages of hiring newcomers.

In a 2004 study, Lopes surveyed 2,091 employers across Canada, asking about their experiences with immigrants who had arrived in Canada within the last ten years. The survey found that employers have a positive view of immigrants and immigration, but also tend to:

- overlook immigrants in their human resource planning;
- hire immigrants below the level appropriate for their training and education; and
- face challenges integrating recent immigrants into their workforce.

The survey findings were presented to employers at a conference round table in 2004 where employers were asked to identify implications of the findings. The following key points were identified:

- Employers should be encouraged to provide more training opportunities for immigrants.

- Governments should re-examine immigration selection criteria.
- More employment-related information and services should be provided to immigrants prior to arrival.
- Temporary foreign students should be considered as a key aspect of Canada’s overall immigration strategy.
- Dialogue with employers and industry should continue, particularly at the community level.

Adey and Gagnon (2007) conducted research with 25 of the largest employers (1,000+) and 12 small-to medium-sized employers in the Ottawa area in order to understand their needs relative to hiring immigrants. Both sets of employers identified similar barriers to hiring immigrants, including:

- Immigrants’ English language skills may not be strong.
- It is challenging to reach immigrants when recruiting, which is largely done by networking.
- Cross-cultural training is needed to prepare and support employers.
- Racism and discrimination in the workplace affect inclusion.
- Strict requirements for sub-contractors on the part of companies procuring services may exclude immigrants.
- Human resource tools are shaped by North American approaches.
- The lack of pre-screening mechanisms to assess immigrants’ English language skills, credentials, and job readiness creates uncertainty for employers who don’t want to make a hiring mistake.

Employers also identified some suggested practices to address the barriers they face. These include:

- Develop mentoring programs and diversity initiatives.
- Engage in-house workplace acculturation specialists.
- Proactively link immigrants to networks used by employers for recruiting.
- Provide cross-cultural training for employers and their workforce.
- Support employers to navigate requirements such as visas, etc.

The research resulted in the creation of Hire Immigrants Ottawa, which includes an Employer Council of Champions that is led by 25 public and private sector employers who champion integration of immigrants in the Ottawa workforce.

See Appendix A for literature review references.

### Immigrant Perspectives on Employment: Contextualizing Employers’ Practices

Immigrant participants identified a number of employment-related challenges, supports, experiences, and ideas. They also emphasized that employment systems interact with other systems — such as health, policing, education, etc. — and that discrimination is not unique to the workplace. Rather, it is impacted and supported by wider social and cultural patterns of discrimination.

### Employment-Related Challenges

#### *Racism and Discrimination*

Immigrants spoke at length about the discrimination they face when seeking employment. This discrimination manifests in a number of ways:



- Refusal to consider foreign credentials, education and experience as valid.
- Discrimination based on English language skills, when this is not required for the job.
- Racial profiling and anti-Black racism.
- Screening out applicants based on their name, immigration status, or accent.

In addition, immigrants who are women, older, or living with a disability identified amplified challenges:

- The impacts of multiple forms of discrimination limits employment opportunities. As one participant explained, “It’s a big difficulty, again, in Canada...They don’t only see our race, but they see also our physical abilities.”
- Immigrants living with a disability are disproportionately disadvantaged because many of the employment opportunities available to them are physical in nature, such as cleaning, labour-intensive manufacturing and construction, personal care, child care, and driving.
- Immigrants who are older when they come to Canada have a shorter window of employment before retirement and may face age-based discrimination.

*Immigrants may experience discrimination in other systems, such as in medical care, which impacts their ability to find and keep employment.*

Addressing the shortcomings that employers identify does not seem to help:

- Immigrants with foreign education are told that they were not considered for a position due to a lack of Canadian education. However, even after retraining in Canada and receiving a Canadian credential, they still cannot find work.
- Immigrants are told that they were not hired due to lack of English language skills. However, after improving their English they still cannot find work.
- Immigrants are told that they are not considered for a position due to a lack of Canadian work experience, but they cannot get hired to gain Canadian experience.

*Little Recognition of Foreign Credentials and Experience*

- Immigrants' professional experience in other countries was not recognized as valid and relevant to the employment they were seeking, even in fields with standardized components, such as accounting.
- At the same time, immigrants who apply for lower-skilled jobs are sometimes told they were not hired because they are "overqualified."
- Immigrants' credentials are often not recognized by credentialing bodies in Canada nor by employers in non-regulated fields. Trying to secure credential recognition is time-consuming and requires extensive system navigation.
- Immigrants must go back to school in Canada, despite already having educational qualifica-

tions, which is frustrating and can lead to increased debt due to student loans. Immigrants may be vulnerable to institutions that charge a high price for "professional programs" and promise high employment rates for graduates, only to find that the credentials that are not valued by employers and the employment does not materialize.

- Immigrants' employment chances may be limited by employers not being able to contact references from their home country.

*Inaccurate Information About Opportunities in Canada*

- In their home country, immigrants receive the message that there will be many opportunities in Canada, that "the sky's the limit," only to come here and find that their skills, experience, and education are not valued and their opportunities are very limited.
- As one participant shared, "You are told that you're going to a free country, and the sky is your limit with the profession you study. And you come here you end up as a taxi driver or you end up in a warehouse and they are told, 'You don't speak English. Go back to school.' And it's sometimes it's very frustrating."

*Employers Hold All the Power*

- There are few mechanisms to balance the power that employers hold (e.g., unions).
- As one participant explained, the hiring process puts all the power in the employers' hands: "I can't call them... I can't get in touch with them. It's like, for me, they didn't value... my resume, my stuff, all of that."
- Participants noted that employers are not held accountable when they discriminate.

- Legal frameworks, like human rights laws, are important but it can be hard to hold employers to account using these mechanisms.

*Temporary Foreign Workers Face Amplified Challenges*

- The power differential is amplified for Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs). Participants reported that employers take advantage of TFWs. One participant shared: "When you come here as a temporary foreign worker, there is not much support from the government. And there are so many employers who are taking advantage of temporary foreign workers, but they don't know where to go or they don't have any access for other resources."
- In addition, supports are not there for TFWs who are injured on the job. One participant shared: "After the accident, Canada was trying to deport me to the Philippines because I cannot work anymore because of my injury. And we fought hard for it, so I could be able to stay."

*Employment Scams May Target Immigrants*

Immigrants may not have knowledge of Canadian employment systems and may be targeted by employment scammers as a result. For example, one participant shared their experience of being asked for money in the job search process: "You have to pay so that you could be employed. How come, like, you have to first pay so that you could be employed? I was so curious to know more about it."

*English Language Skills and Training*

- As one participant noted, "I didn't know English, so they would not consider me."
- Balancing paid work with language training classes is difficult and sometimes means that immigrants can only work part time so they

can study and attend classes. Working full time would affect their language learning, which would limit their options and leave them stuck.

- Some participants found it difficult to participate in interviews because the interviewers talked quickly in English and did not accommodate the immigrant's level of English.
- Immigrants who have settled in a smaller centre may not have access to retraining and educational programs.
- It may be hard to find the right training program unless immigrants can access support from family, networks, or settlement agencies.

*The Trap of Survival Work*

Without the opportunity to secure professional employment in their fields, despite having education and sometimes decades of experience in other countries, immigrants can get trapped in survival work.

- Immigrants are forced to take low-paying and often physical work to survive.
- Because the work is low-paying, they must work long hours to earn enough to support themselves and their families, and may need to keep changing jobs if they can earn slightly more pay.
- Because of the long hours, immigrants do not have the time or energy to secure Canadian education or pursue licensure or accreditation in their fields. Thus, they are trapped in low-paying work.

*Lack of Networks in Canada*

Without networks of support, it can be very challenging to find work.

- As one participant explained, "If we don't have connections, no one will give you this job."



- Many participants note that networks are crucial for finding work, but this may be different from the way things work in their home country.
- Many immigrants do not know where to go for help and they need networks to direct them.
- Accessing online job sites like Indeed is not helpful if you are not well-versed in Canadian job-seeking and application norms. Immigrants need people to help them navigate the employment systems.

#### *Impact of Unemployment*

- If immigrants cannot find work, the entire family experiences stress and the family may break apart. Children in immigrant families that are under this kind of stress may experience inter-generational impacts.
- Dealing with employment-related discrimination can lead immigrants to feel discouraged and despondent.

#### *Helpful Employment-Related Supports (Existing and Desired)*

In the face of challenges identified above, participants noted the supports that help them find and succeed in employment.

#### *Having Networks in Canada*

A key helpful support for finding employment was having a network in place.

- Whether family, friends, church groups, or other connections, having someone in Canada who could vouch for you and link you to employment opportunities was noted as a significant support for many immigrants.

- These networks also provide social support and emotional support for immigrants during the difficult job search process.

#### *Support Programs*

- Having access to government support programs is crucial for immigrants who are unable to work. One participant shared that Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) was an important program for them, as they were injured on the job in Canada, resulting in a lifelong disability. However, their ability to supplement AISH through part-time work is very limited.

- Some participants noted that entrepreneurship training or loan programs for immigrants who want to start their own businesses were important. In the face of limited employment, immigrants could use their skills to become self-employed.

- Accessing a settlement agency for assistance or organizations like Catholic Social Services or Norquest were also supports identified.

- For immigrants with disabilities, accessing an agency like EmployAbilities could be helpful.

#### *Training*

- Immigrants' willingness to retrain in order to find employment was seen as helpful.
- Retraining in a new field is helpful, especially in a field that needs employees, but is difficult as it requires time, energy, and money.
- Participants noted that training support would be helpful in securing employment, since so many employers want to see Canadian credentials and/or require training certificates related to workplace safety (such as Workplace

Hazardous Materials Information System [WHMIS], etc.).

#### *Volunteering*

Volunteering was seen as a helpful practice for gaining some Canadian experience and expanding networks. However, dedicating time to unpaid work is difficult when you're trying to survive and need to earn money to support yourself and your family.

#### *Staying Positive*

Despite facing barriers, many participants remain hopeful and focused on meeting their employment goals.

#### *Experiences in the Workplace*

##### *Lower Pay*

Immigrants experience inequitable pay based on immigration status and gender: "I feel like you're an immigrant, you get paid lesser. And then well, to top it off you're a woman, you get paid lesser. So, in my field, yeah, I know that's happening. You don't say much because you need a job."

##### *Given Worst Tasks*

Immigrants are sometimes assigned the worst tasks: "When we are at work, sometimes you find out you were given the worst assignment, like the hard one, and have to do that."

##### *Unacknowledged*

- Some participants noted that employers do not seem to see how hard they work.
- Employers don't seem to care when immigrants are ill, they just want the work done: "They don't care about your health, they care about the job."
- Some immigrants reported feeling like they "don't matter" and they "don't exist," which leads to feeling "demoralized."

- Employers can be patronizing towards immigrants.

#### *TFWs are Taken Advantage Of*

- Employers take advantage of TFWs by overworking them, paying less, or not paying them for overtime.
- TFWs do not have any recourse if they get injured on the job as they may not be insured by the company.
- Employers try to avoid paying TFWs more after their probation period is over and sometimes fire them after the probation period.

#### *Fear of Speaking Up*

- Discrimination, racism, and microaggressions happen in the workplace and it can be difficult for immigrants to speak up because they need their job. As one participant explained, "Most immigrants have no choice but to endure all those things that are happening."
- Some immigrants may not speak out about their experiences due to fear they'll lose their job: "Some people, they're scared. If they lose their job, they have nowhere to go. Because you are trying to defend yourself for something which is against your own rights."
- When facing discrimination and/or being passed over for promotions, some immigrants "will stay and put up with discrimination in order to pay the bills."

#### *Employers Can Do What They Want*

- It was noted that employers have all the power in the workplace: "The employers are also exercising their rights because they own the company. And they feel like they can do anything they want."

- It was also noted that employers will at times perform inclusion, while not actually being inclusive. There are no mechanisms to hold them to account for their inclusion commitments.

#### *Some Employers Create a Positive Environment*

- There are some “good” companies that help to create positive workplace experiences for immigrants because they are accepting: “That means the company likes them the way they are, and accepted them as who they are — their colour, their beliefs. And they are happy, they feel at home. But for many, many immigrants it’s a problem.”
- Some employers provide opportunities for training and skill development and support immigrant employees in learning from colleagues.
- Some employers offer a safe and clean work environment that has proper equipment and proper safety training for workers.
- Immigrant-owned businesses tend to be more equitable, but not always.

#### *Ideas to Improve Experiences in the Workplace*

Participants identified a number of ideas to improve their experiences in the workplace:

- Unions, when they are fair and not unduly influenced by the employer.
- Taking legal action against the company because you can get compensation and it might prevent the company from discriminating in the future.
- Education for immigrants about their rights.
- More research on discrimination in the workplace and taking action based on findings.
- Government supports and programs to assist immigrants.

- Supports for immigrants to address discrimination.
- Develop ways to hold employers accountable for discrimination in hiring and promotion and/or in workplace culture.
- Immigrant voices need to be heard and government and other actors need to take action.

#### *Challenges With Promotion and Advancement*

- It can be hard to have the right skill set to get a promotion.
- There is discrimination towards racialized immigrants when it comes to pay and promotion. As one participant shared, “Even if you work two, three years or five years more than the new employee, the new employee who is white, this white person is gonna get the raise over you.”
- Sometimes immigrants are excluded from insider networks: “There are some meetings that you’re not included. It’s not being inclusive.”
- There is a lack of transparency in how promotion and pay decisions are made, and employees have no recourse to challenge these decisions.
- Employers may discriminate on the basis of accents and make problematic assumptions about an immigrant employees’ capabilities based on having an accent: “They hired you, but they’re doubting you one way or because you’re an immigrant. You have the accent. And then you work hard, like for me I was working so hard to show them that I know this, I know my job, I can do this.”

#### *Immigrants’ Strengths*

Participants pointed to a number of strengths that many immigrant employees bring, including:

- Motivated to do a good job.
- Dedicated to the workplace and likely to stay in a job, though sometimes this is because they have little choice while “Canadians, they can easily take off.”
- Hardworking, sometimes working multiple jobs at the same time.
- Skilled, with the ability to do the work.
- Provide new perspectives, contribute to company growth, and economic power.
- Humble, and want to be a “better person” and take care of their families.
- Resilient, remaining hopeful in the face of difficult circumstances.
- They can bring social change.

#### **Employer Perspectives on Hiring Immigrants**

The following themes were identified in the data collected from employers.

##### *Focus on Hiring Immigrants*

Most employers included in the research do not focus on hiring immigrants.

- Only three employers focus on hiring immigrants, and only one of these has a coordinated strategy to do so.
- Some employers have a focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and consider immigrant hiring as already incorporated within strategies to hire members of racialized groups.
- Some employers noted that they are focused on hiring any employees with the skills to do the job and the strategies they use would apply to everyone, including immigrants.



#### *Motivation to Hire Immigrants*

Employers are motivated to hire immigrants for a variety of reasons.

- The need for employees, often combined with a small labour pool.
- To gain credibility by reflecting the community they serve.
- To demonstrate inclusion, sometimes in response to a public incident.
- Because they are themselves immigrants and know the barriers facing this population.
- They believe it is the right thing to do.

Hiring immigrants was also described as a “good return on investment” due to higher rates of productivity, longer retention, and less absenteeism.

#### *Positions Immigrants Are Hired For*

The majority of employers participating in this research typically hire immigrants into entry-level positions. Some employers noted they are beginning to consider ways to hire immigrants directly into management positions.

#### **Employers’ Views of Immigrants’ Strengths**

##### *Hardworking*

When asked about immigrants’ strengths, employers repeatedly mentioned that immigrants have high stamina, are hardworking, and have a strong work ethic.



- For example, one employer described their experience with hiring immigrants: “One of the advantages that comes in with a foreign worker or a foreign graduate is in order for them to reach this position or title or certificate, they probably will be doing double the effort or triple the effort of somebody that is a graduate or originally coming in not a foreign worker.”
- Another employer noted, “They are the very hardworking people, the most hardworking people, I would say, across Canada.”

Immigrants were also described as eager to learn and prove themselves and willing to go above and beyond the job requirements.

- For example, one employer shared: “They’ve been great workers for us. They’ve got a great work ethic. They want to learn. They want to absorb as much as they can.”

### Grateful

Significantly, employers saw immigrants’ willingness to work without complaint as a key strength. Immigrants were often described as having a positive attitude and being resilient in the face of hardship. This was seen as a strength that contributes to the workplace but that is sometimes invisible.

- For example, one employer shared: “I really hate that whole idea of Canadian experience, or North American experience over the experience of others, because honestly... living through war times, and through, you know, all these other adversities that people experienced, and what they learn from that... I think those are big oversights in our processes and how we operate in our businesses.”

Sometimes employers linked this resilience with gratitude for the employment and employment conditions offered to them. Some employers compared immigrants to Canadian-born employees, describing

immigrants as more grateful and therefore less likely to raise concerns or make workplace demands.

- For example, one employer noted: “You can’t even fathom what some of them have been through and what they have escaped and the gratitude that they come with, you know, to be in a place that’s safe and where you’re treated well... That kind of stuff tends to maybe give pause to some other workers who go, ‘Hmm. I might complain about, you know, whatever I don’t like about my job or work. Hmm. He’s very grateful. You know, he or she is very grateful for what they have. And maybe I should rethink what I’m complaining about.’ Right?”

### Positive and Compassionate

Immigrants were noted as having good soft skills, the ability to get along with others and to maintain a positive attitude in the face of hardship. Immigrants were noted as being empathetic, compassionate, and resilient, which was attributed to having experienced hardships.

- For example, one employer explained: “There are some key traits that have nothing to do with education... It has to do with, you know, how you look at the world, who you are. So, are you resilient? You know, are you flexible? You know, do you have some emotional intelligence? Do you have an understanding of different people’s, you know, have you overcome difficult times, you know, what are your expectations? How do you work with others? There are all these intangibles that are important to a job that people from other countries bring.”

### Willing to Take Jobs Canadians Won’t

Immigrants were described as flexible and willing to take on jobs Canadians aren’t willing to do, a factor many employers noted was a key strength.

- One employer explained how Canadian-born and immigrant workers differed in this regard: “There’s a little bit of, you know, a self-righteousness, you know, what do they call it, white privilege... that I think, ‘Oh, I wouldn’t take a job like that, or this.’ There’s those sorts of quirks that we have that, you know, that you’re not going to get with immigrants, right?”

### Highly Skilled and Educated

Immigrants were described as often being highly skilled, educated, and experienced. Employers noted that often immigrants’ foreign credentials and licenses were not formally recognized in Canada, which prevented them from working in their professional fields in Canada. Employers saw these skills as a strength, nonetheless, even if they were not directly related to the positions immigrants were hired for.

- For example, one employer explained: “You have some good transferable skills... So you could have had people... from other countries that weren’t, those qualifications weren’t recognized in Canada... So, you know, that benefited the organization.”

### Knowledge of Languages and Cultures

Many employers noted that immigrant language skills were a strength and that the workplace benefited from access to multilingual employees, particularly if the workplace is diverse and employs a large number of immigrants. Language skills could be used to facilitate the employer’s communication with other immigrant employees.

- For example, one employer noted, “They speak two, three, four languages. Sometimes we need that, right?”

Similarly, cultural knowledge was seen as a strength that could be useful to ensure cultural sensitivity in diverse workplaces.

- For example, another employer shared: “Whether it’s related to their home country, their religion, or their culture, whatever that is, having that knowledge, as part of our functioning workplace, I think is immensely important to talk about cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness, and all those other different factors that can sometimes be challenging in different workplaces...”

### Knowledge of Different Ways of Working

Employers noted that immigrants can bring technical knowledge of approaches used in other countries, which could be harnessed by employers for innovation and cost-saving strategies. In addition, immigrants sometimes bring knowledge of international markets, which is also a strength.

- For example, one employer noted: “Where we find the strength is everyone’s thinking power is different than the other. So, they’re not all thinking the same... So that’s where we find the talent, the cultural differences that we have and make a big impact in the way they do things. The ideas that they bring forward to the group is always a different way of approaching things. So, we find that always helped us grow as a company.”



- Another shared: “They brought in ideas on different processes. They see things differently with a different perspective. So, I think that’s always something of value as well.”
- Yet another employer noted: “People coming from different cultures, different schools and education systems, they can inject a different way of thinking... Because simply, we all understand the same thing. Because we came from the same school, we drink from the same hose or the fountain. But when you bring someone else, they have a different exposure and keep wondering why and how.”

### Hiring, Retaining, and Promoting Immigrants

The majority of employers do not have formal strategic plans for hiring, retaining, and promoting immigrants. Employers were, nonetheless, able to identify strategies they use on a more ad hoc basis. It is important to highlight that the effectiveness of these strategies is unknown. In many cases, employers did not provide any comments on impacts of these strategies. When observations about effectiveness were offered, they were only supported by limited personal observations, rather than research or tracking and measuring outcomes.

In addition to strategies for hiring, retention, and promotion of immigrants, many employers described strategies they use for equity-denied groups, which they noted were also helpful for, and applicable to, immigrants. Some employers also described strategies for any employee as being applicable to immigrants.

Some participants observed that some positions are easier for immigrants to secure; for example, jobs in the gig economy or in service and labour-intensive industries, or the public sector organizations subject to employment equity legislation and public pressure.

### Hiring Strategies

Employers identified a number of strategies they use to hire immigrants.

#### The Job Posting

- Minimize focus on formal education in the job posting. Include experience requirements and note you will recognize experience outside of Canada.
- Ensure job postings use simple and direct language and focus on the aims of the position, not specific tasks, in order to value multiple ways of doing things.
- Review and revise job postings to communicate to diverse audiences, rather than describing the way it is done at your organization and the expectation that applicants conform.
- Use language that will resonate with immigrants’ values.
- Be very clear about what you want to see in the application package so that immigrants unfamiliar with Canadian resume norms will not be disadvantaged.

#### Recruiting Applicants

- Share job postings in spaces where immigrants are most likely to encounter them, i.e.: with immigration officers, immigrant networks, immigrant-serving organizations, immigrant-focused employment service organizations, and ethnic media.
- Encourage current immigrant employees to share opportunities and their workplace experience with other immigrants. Ensure the experiences are positive by creating an inclusive workplace.
- Share job postings in ways that reach groups that may not have access to technology or understand Canadian job search norms.



- Ensure your organization’s website is immigrant-friendly so that immigrants will be more likely to see you positively.
- Host hiring fairs and advertise to immigrant communities. Partner with other organizations, if possible, to offer a variety of employment options in a one-stop shop.
- Host informal information sessions about available jobs and ensure they are welcoming and inclusive for immigrants.

#### Screening and Interviewing Applicants

- Involve immigrant employees in the hiring process to advise and participate in decision-making.
- Tell applicants, in detail, what to expect in the interview process. If possible, share questions, a conversation guide, organizational information, etc. ahead of time.
- Use careful wording of interview questions to recognize communication and cultural differences.
- Include open-ended interview questions to ensure the interview process makes space for applicants to share their skills and experiences broadly, even if not directly related to the position.
- Use a casual, conversational interview ap-

proach to put people at ease.

#### Negotiating Compensation

- Ask applicants to identify their needs and encourage them to communicate what they want.
- Where appropriate, coach applicants on negotiating salary if offered the position.

#### Advocacy

- Advocate for hiring immigrant applicants to others in your organization.

#### Retention Strategies

Employers utilize a number of strategies to retain immigrants once they are hired.

#### Provide Supports for Successful Job Performance

- Ensure that immigrants understand their roles and provide individualized training or support to address any performance gaps.
- Offer on-site English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes.

#### Learn About and Respond to Needs

- Learn about immigrants’ needs, particularly needs related to cultural norms or maintenance of family ties. Be flexible and accommodate these needs.
- Identify and honour immigrant employees’ values and what is important to them. Incorporate these into the workplace.
- Develop relationships with individual immigrant employees in order to provide them with emotional and personal support.
- Provide wellness supports such as access to prayer rooms, religious leaders, a chaplain, health benefits, etc.



- Help to problem-solve financial challenges and provide individualized financial supports where possible. Help people to find housing or accommodations.



#### Provide Rewards

- Express your appreciation. Encourage your employees.
- Pay retention bonuses.
- Provide perks that are desirable, such as community service opportunities.

#### Use Good Management Practices

- Support independence. Do not micromanage. Recognize multiple ways of doing and being.
- Involve employees in decision-making. Share information openly with employees, particularly with regards to promotion opportunities.
- Recognize that mistakes happen and respond to employees with support.

#### Create Inclusive Workplace Culture

- Create an inclusive workplace culture where people feel safe to speak up, give opinions and

share knowledge; an environment of fairness, excellence, safety, and good pay.

- Challenge and change discriminatory systems, structures, and practices in your organization.
- Educate staff about each other's differences.
- Create a welcoming environment through visual displays of different cultures and countries. Play music from different cultures at events and in the workplace if appropriate.
- Recognize cultural practices, celebrations, religious holidays, etc. in the workplace.
- See people moving on to better positions in other organizations as positive and celebrate it.

#### Promotion Strategies

Employers identified a few strategies that they use to promote immigrants.

#### Use Performance Reflection to Identify Interests

- Rather than formal performance reviews, have a more informal process of performance reflections to discover people's interests and note these for future openings.

#### Support Learning and Development

- Provide in-house and/or external professional development opportunities.
- Provide a pathway for advancement and support the development needed to move along the pathway.

#### Ensure Positions Are Available

- Provide opportunities for people to move into positions they are qualified for.
- Create collaborative leadership positions.

#### Recruit Internally

- Post leadership positions internally first.

In addition to these strategies, it was noted that employers should be encouraged to make leadership in their organizations reflect the diversity in workforce and larger community. They should include a goal of representative leadership in their EDI/HR plan, work to get buy-in from company owners and provide supports for immigrant's successful transition into leadership.

#### Challenges

- In addition to strategies, employers identified challenges they face when seeking to hire, retain, and promote immigrants. Employers also noted some challenges immigrants face and the impact these challenges can have on employers' efforts.

#### Hard for Employers to Attract Applicants

- It is hard to attract immigrants to apply for jobs.
- Employers may struggle to hire immigrant women who, they assert, may not want to work outside the home.

#### Hard for Employers to Recruit Immigrants With Necessary Licensure/Credentials

- It can be hard to find immigrants with the credentials required for the job.
- Immigrants' foreign licenses, credentials, and qualifications are often not recognized in Canada.
- Immigrants struggle with the cost of studying for and taking Canadian licensure exams.
- Immigrants may be unable to get the Canadian internships or the experience required for licensure in Canada.

#### Employers' Biases Limit Immigrants' Opportunities

- Employers prefer Canadian credentials and work experience.
- Employers want to hire people they are comfortable with — people who are like them.
- Employers discriminate against immigrants on the basis of having an accent.
- Employers assume they don't have to pay immigrants as much as Canadians.
- Bias in the workplace makes being there challenging for immigrants.

#### English Language Skills Impact Immigrants' Performance

- Immigrants may have poor English language skills. These may affect job safety and complaints with occupational health and safety legislation.
- Onboarding employees with different levels of fluency in English is difficult.

#### Organizational Change Is Difficult

- Organizations resist change, so they perform inclusion rather than actually doing it.
- Organizational policies and systems constrain what is possible for hiring managers who want to hire immigrants.
- It is hard to move employers beyond diversity to focus on equity and inclusion so that immigrants have access to good wages and opportunities for promotion.

#### Lack of Data to Inform Employer Decisions

- Organizations don't track the immigration status of employees.
- Employees may be afraid that immigrant status will be used to discriminate so they don't want to reveal it.

### Hard for Employers to Assess Immigrants' Applications

- Immigrants don't always know how to present their skills/competencies in a Canadian employment context.
- Immigrants do not understand Canadian job-seeking norms.

### Lack of Employer Accountability

- No mechanisms to hold employers accountable for their biases.

### Integrating Immigrants in the Workplace May Be Challenging

- Immigrants may think differently.
- Immigrants' culture may differ from the organizational culture.
- Immigrants may not understand the business culture in Canada or Canadian markets.
- Immigrants may be unfamiliar with Canadian currency and the technologies used in the workplace.
- Employers can be welcoming but also need immigrants to "show up" and put in the effort.

### Hard to Retain Immigrants Due to Other Opportunities

- There are a lot of jobs available and more immigrants are making changes this year.
- Immigrants have to support their families and make ends meet so may move to another job, even for slightly higher pay.
- Immigrants who are ambitious will look for companies where they can advance instead of staying in a smaller company with limited opportunities.

### Addressing Employer Challenges

Employers identified a number of strategies they have used or are using to address the challenges they face in hiring, retaining, and promoting immigrants. In addition to these strategies, it was noted that in the future, employers should also develop a formal plan to hire immigrants and include targets, measures, and accountability; offer positions above entry-level; and redesign jobs to fit immigrants' preferred work schedule and accommodate families with two working parents in balancing child-care responsibilities.

### Seek Assistance From Job Placement Agencies

- Reach out to immigrant job placement agencies for help with recruitment, as well as job design and the interview process.

### Mitigate Bias

- Review job postings, job design, and the hiring process to bring out immigrants' skills and competencies rather than relying on Canadian education or experience.
- Provide training for hiring managers to address bias.
- Reframe the different values, culture, practices, and knowledge that immigrants bring as a positive contribution to the workplace.

### Communicate Clearly

- Avoid using jargon in the job posting and interview process.
- Provide clear expectations and guidance to immigrants about what to include in their application package and how to succeed in the interview process.

### Use Translation Services

- Pair new employees with employees who can assist them in their own language and who have strong English skills.

- Use a translator or professional translation service to communicate during the hiring process, onboarding, and for any required training.

### Provide Accommodations During Onboarding

- Develop orientation training specifically for immigrants to orient them to the Canadian workplace if they have not worked in Canada.
- Provide extra training when onboarding this group.
- Provide extra time for existing onboarding programs.
- Provide language assistance/translation during the onboarding process.
- Assign a mentor or coach to assist with workplace integration.
- Learn about cultural norms and have empathetic coaching conversations to help immigrants understand the organizational culture.

### Support Language Learning

- Offer on-site English language classes.

### Support Achievement of Canadian Credentials

- Provide support for immigrants to undertake further training and formal education.

### Addressing Barriers for Immigrants That Impact Employers' Efforts

In some cases, the challenges employers face when hiring, retaining, and promoting immigrants are a result of the barriers that immigrants themselves face. Strategies for employers and others to support immigrants in the face of these barriers were also identified.

- Advise immigrants to volunteer in order to get Canadian experiences and learn about Canadian work culture. But also advise them not to assimilate.

- Advise immigrants to find a job in a related field first, as a stepping stone, while awaiting accreditation in their chosen profession.
- Inform immigrants that loans are available to support them while they study for licensure exams and for the cost of the exam itself.

### Equitable Hiring, Retaining and Promoting (All Equity-Denied Groups)

#### Equitable Hiring Strategies

Employers referenced a number of equitable hiring strategies that they believed would pertain to immigrants. A few employers had formalized equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) plans in place to support these strategies and had a system to measure and track success in terms of employee demographics, by position, over time. The effectiveness of individual strategies is unknown, but the few employers who track employee demographics have seen some initial success in ensuring more representation from equity groups overall.

#### Champion EDI

- Have leadership champion EDI to the entire organization in order to communicate its importance.
- Be aware of your privilege, learn from your mistakes and from the experiences of others.

#### Set Specific Goals and Measure Progress

- Set EDI hiring goals.
- Conduct employee surveys to track demographic changes over time.
- Collect data that can be disaggregated to give a more detailed picture.
- Focus hiring strategies on a specific population, rather than equity groups generally.



#### Attend to Workplace Culture

- Develop an inclusive workplace culture to reduce bias in hiring and in general.
- Provide training for all staff on bias, racism, and other forms of discrimination.

#### Engage Employees in Recruitment

- Develop an employee referral reward program to promote sharing of job opportunities.
- Post all job positions internally and externally.

#### Avoid Bias in Job Postings

- Where possible, use competency-based hiring practices rather than emphasizing formal educational credentials.
- Identify and include only the essential qualifications and experience in the job posting.
- Do not reproduce bias in the job posting. Use gender-neutral and inclusive language, a welcoming tone, and try to appeal to a wide variety of people and diverse values.

#### Mitigate Bias in Hiring Process

- Reduce bias by providing training for hiring managers.
- Have a clearly defined hiring process and include human resource professionals in all aspects of the process.
- Remove information that might identify the applicants' race, gender, ability, or other factors when reviewing applications in order to reduce opportunity for bias.
- Have multiple people review applications and participate in the hiring panel. Use a standardized, well-designed scoring rubric for assessment.

- Host structured interviews with clear questions that are all linked to essential competencies for the position.
- Include a pre-interview assignment or a pre-recorded video to allow applicants to more fully showcase their skills.

#### Support Strategies to Address Shortage of Members of Equity-Denied Groups in Labour Pool

- Address “pipeline” issues that result in too few graduates from equity-denied groups and impact ability to hire.
- Support universities, offer educational support to existing employees, and promote your profession to underrepresented groups.

#### Equitable Retention and Promotion Strategies

Employers utilize a number of strategies to retain and promote members of equity-denied groups. The extent to which these practices are effective is unknown as few employers have tracked and measured impact. That said, the few employers who do track employee demographics by position noted that while some gains have been made, members of equity-denied groups are not yet appropriately reflected in leadership positions.

#### Conduct an Equity Assessment

- Regularly conduct an equity evaluation including a review of job descriptions and compensation. Take action in response to findings, including adjusting compensation levels as needed.

#### Champion EDI

- Communicate with employees regularly to signal your commitment to EDI.
- Actively solicit employees' ideas to enhance EDI and report back on organizational strategies and progress.

#### Attend to Workplace Culture

- Create a positive work experience and work environment.
- Create spaces that meet the needs of equity-denied groups, such as prayer rooms and quiet spaces for breastfeeding.
- Host social events to recognize cultures/religions and provide opportunities for people to share their experiences.
- Implement flexible work arrangements such as working at home, flex days, etc.
- Be respectful of others, while recognizing that respect and dignity will look different for different people.
- Communicate consistent expectations for employees.

#### Challenges in Equitable Hiring, Retention, and Promotion

In addition to strategies, employers identified challenges they face when seeking to hire, retain, and promote members of equity-denied groups, including immigrants.

#### Some Factors Are Outside Employers' Control

- Employers can't control external factors that impact hiring, such as the underrepresentation of equity-denied groups in the educational “pipeline” that produces people available to hire, issues in the recognition of foreign credentials, and issues with securing internships required for licensure.

#### Unappealing Work

- The type of work offered by the employer may not appeal to some EDI groups.

#### Discrimination in the Workplace

- Disrespectful behaviours towards women and racialized employees, including immigrants,

may impact retention.

- There is little recourse for harassment and discrimination in some workplaces.

#### Organizational Limitations

- Small organizations with low turnover and/or few leadership positions cannot provide many opportunities for advancement.
- There is little flexibility for some employers to increase pay in order to retain employees.
- Employees are different and have different needs. Is it impossible for employers to meet them all?

#### Addressing Challenges in Equitable Hiring, Retention, and Promotion

Employers identified a number of strategies they have used or are using to address the challenges they face in hiring, retaining members of equity-denied groups, including immigrants.

#### Conduct an Equity Assessment

- Conduct an equity audit. Use existing resources, such as human resource professionals or a health and safety committee, to identify issues and strategies to address them.

#### Communicate About EDI

- Identify and communicate strategies (individual and organizational) to respond to incidents of discrimination.
- Communicate the need to be respectful and treat everyone with dignity. Use existing harassment and discrimination policies as a guide.

#### Support Employee Learning

- Provide ongoing training on EDI-related topics.
- Educate employees about differences.

- Share results of equity reviews widely and use them to educate about discrimination.

#### Lead by Example

- Acknowledge differences/different needs and respond appropriately.

#### Influence Others

- Work with organizations, post-secondary institutions, and others to help them understand labour market needs and equity gaps, and to influence their policies and practices.

#### Supports That Might Help Employers Hire, Retain, and Promote Immigrants

The employers included in this study were selected, in part, because they already hire immigrants. They identified further supports that would help them continue, and increase, efforts to hire, retain, and promote immigrants in their workplaces.

#### Develop Pathways to Credential Recognition for Immigrants

As noted above, finding immigrant employees with the appropriate credentials that are recognized in Canada and who have Canadian work experience can be challenging.

- Government policy changes are needed to recognize foreign credentials.
- It would be helpful to create intermediary or internship positions where immigrants could work in their profession, under supervision of a credentialed professional, while waiting for their own credentials to be recognized. This would be particularly effective in professions where Canadian experience is required for the credential but immigrants can't get hired without already having the credential.
- Strategies should be developed to interrupt the cycle whereby highly skilled and educated

immigrants take survival work while awaiting accreditation or as an interim measure to financially support their families and become stuck in these positions, over time finding it harder and harder to return to the profession.

- Mentoring programs for existing credentialed professionals to guide immigrants through the credential recognition application process would be helpful to address any gaps in knowledge about navigating that system/process.
- Address bias in the evaluation committee's assessment of credential applications to ensure immigrant applicants are not disadvantaged.

#### Provide Information to Support Employers in Hiring Immigrants

Employers are not always aware of immigrants' strengths, how to assess them, and the benefits of employing immigrants. They may not have the knowledge of effective practices or of the organizations available to support them with hiring immigrants.

- Provide data on the number of immigrants in an area, detailing their credentials, training, and professional skills in order to showcase the high-quality pool of talent available.
- Provide employers with information about how to reach out to immigrants when hiring.
- Provide data that demonstrates the financial benefits of hiring immigrants so employers can balance this against the perceived financial risk associated with hiring, onboarding, and training immigrants.
- Provide information resources on effective practices in hiring immigrants.
- Provide information on organizations and job placement agencies that can help employers.

- Provide information on the benefits of diversity.

#### Provide Training and Work Experience Opportunities for Immigrants

Employers prefer Canadian credentials and work experience.

- Provide training programs, opportunities, and supports for immigrants.
- Provide mentorship for immigrants to support them in securing Canadian work experience and in planning their careers.

#### Support Employers in Recruitment Efforts

Employers may not always understand the best way to reach immigrants to communicate job opportunities.

- Recruitment fairs that are marketed to immigrants would be helpful.
- Information about where to post jobs and how to get information out to the right candidate would be helpful.
- Providing booths at employment events would also be helpful.

#### Support Employers in Organizational Change

Employers, particularly smaller employers, may not have the mechanisms in place that help to hire, retain, and promote immigrants.

- Provide support for development and/or redesign of human resource systems and practices to reflect effective strategies for hiring and retaining immigrants.
- Provide information and human resource guidance related to immigrant hiring to support employers that don't have a dedicated human resources department.

- Provide EDI education and awareness training for employers, particularly for leadership who can champion EDI within the organization.

- Provide support for employers to intentionally create an inclusive workplace and a safe space for conversations.

- Provide coaching and follow up support for employers on how to respond to challenges and workplace issues that may arise in relation to hiring immigrants.

#### Support Employers in Enhancing Their Reputation

Employers who are making efforts to hire immigrants and members of equity-denied groups should be showcased and promoted.

- Provide a mechanism for employers to communicate their commitment to EDI.
- Share information about and promote employers who are making efforts to be more inclusive and/or who have had success hiring immigrants.

#### Enhance Transportation Services

Edmonton's transit system's hours of service do not allow employees who work early morning shifts to take transit to work. Employees without access to a vehicle, including immigrants, would be particularly affected by this.

- Extend the hours of public transportation.



# Discussion and Implications

## Social Inclusion

The 2021 SIS report drew upon Ager and Strang’s model of social inclusion.<sup>6</sup> The model emphasises the importance of identifying and understanding how cultural groups connect within and beyond their communities. Three key aspects of connection comprise the model and all three are required for people to experience full inclusion. The first aspect is found in bonds with members of the same cultural community; the second in connection with members of different cultural communities; and the third in links between members of cultural communities and systems and structures, with a particular focus on power, policies, programs, and supports.

Employment is one key link with systems and structures and a crucial aspect of social inclusion. Being excluded from labour market participation can have devastating effects on individuals, couples, and families with children.

- There are few employers who specifically target immigrant hiring as a goal and few systems for holding employers accountable to equitable hiring.
- Some employers do seek to ensure equitable hiring with EDI targets due to a commitment to equity, while others seek to reflect the community they serve or achieve social approval.
- Some employers have tracking systems which measure the extent to which positions and pay

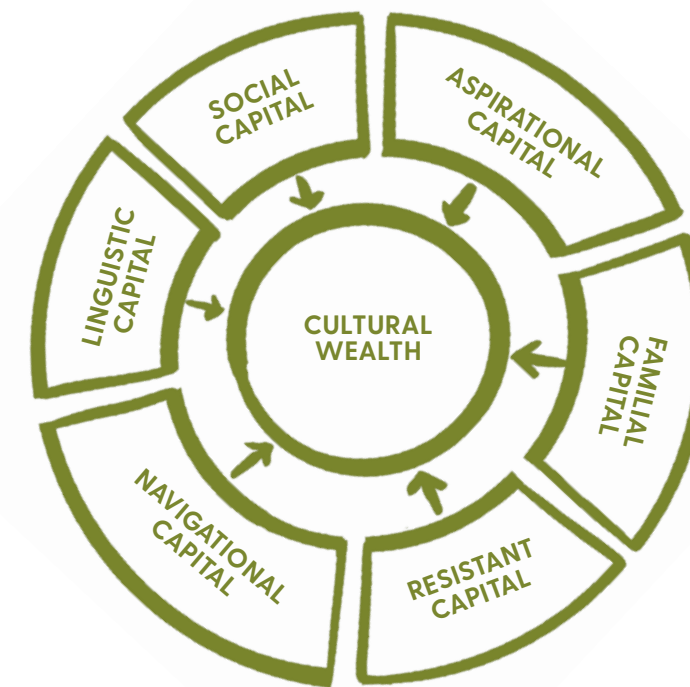
reflect equity goals they have set. This seems to be helpful in highlighting exclusions and supporting targeted recruitment efforts.

- Immigrants noted the lack of inclusion in meaningful, well-paying employment that recognized and made use of their skills.
- Immigrants shared experiences of discrimination when seeking or holding employment and noted the impacts of power on their employment experiences, with employers holding all of the power.
- Some immigrants impacted by multiple systems of exclusion, including gender, older age, and living with a disability, are disproportionately affected by discrimination.

## Cultural Wealth

The 2021 SIS report identified another key conceptual model, the Cultural Wealth Model.<sup>7</sup> This model looks beyond the economic contributions that immigrants make to Edmonton’s communities to examine six forms of capital. Together, these forms of capital demonstrate the rich, cultural wealth that immigrants bring to this community.

**ASPIRATIONAL CAPITAL** is described as the capacity to maintain hope, and the inspirational pursuit of dreams, in the face of barriers and adversity.



- Employers valued immigrant’s aspirational capital, expressed in their willingness to work hard, go above and beyond the job requirements, and apply their full set of skills. Employers noted that immigrants are eager to demonstrate their capabilities and will work hard to prove themselves in the workplace. Some employers noted the need to address the lack of management-level opportunities for immigrants and the focus on entry-level work when recruiting.
- Immigrants noted the high rate of entry-level, low-paying work that is available. The positions they can secure are often less skilled work than they are capable of doing or have done in the past. They also noted the lack of advancement opportunities, as well as being passed over for advancement opportunities, despite positive feedback on their workplace performance.
- Immigrant’s familial connections are valued by employers who are experiencing labour shortage and seeking employees. Immigrants can help spread the word about jobs through their community and family networks and share their experience of the workplace culture. This can put some pressure on employers to ensure the workplace culture is inclusive in order to support successful recruitment efforts.
- Employers also valued cultural knowledge if it can be harnessed to support an effective workplace. Immigrants can help employers understand the cultural values and norms of their employees.
- Immigrants noted that familial and social connections were essential components of successfully securing employment. Many immigrants noted that if they do not have networks to rely on, it is incredibly difficult to find work.

**FAMILIAL AND SOCIAL CAPITAL** includes cultural knowledge developed and maintained within family structures and the strength of networks, and associations with peers and community members.

**RESISTANT CAPITAL** includes the strength, knowledge, and skills developed as a result of challenging inequity.

- Immigrants’ lack of resistant capital in work environments was valued by employers who

<sup>6</sup> As cited in Edmonton (2021). *Belonging: Stories of the Dignity and Resilience of Immigrants*.

<sup>7</sup> Edmonton (2021). *Belonging: Stories of the Dignity and Resilience of Immigrants*.

see immigrants as appreciative, grateful, and less likely to complain about workplace issues than their Canadian counterparts. Employers shared that immigrants were grateful to be given a chance and this made employers feel good about being able to offer immigrants employment opportunities.

- Immigrants noted feeling very vulnerable in the workplace. While they might have complaints and suggestions for improvement, they do not feel like they can raise them without risking retaliation and potential job loss.

**LINGUISTIC CAPITAL** includes the strengths developed by interacting through multiple languages.

- Employers appreciated immigrants’ multilingualism and saw this as a helpful support in international markets and in diverse workplaces, where immigrants could help the employer to communicate with others and ensure a smooth and functioning workplace.
- Employers also noted the quality of immigrants’ English skills as an important factor in hiring and the desire to hire people with strong English skills. Some employers had strategies to support the development of English language skills by offering English as an Additional Language (EAL) training, pairing employees with others who have strong English, or assigning mentors.
- Immigrants noted that English language skills were very important for securing employment. When these skills are not strong, immigrants experience barriers to employment.

**NAVIGATIONAL CAPITAL** includes the skills of facing and overcoming the systemic challenges that immigrants often experience.

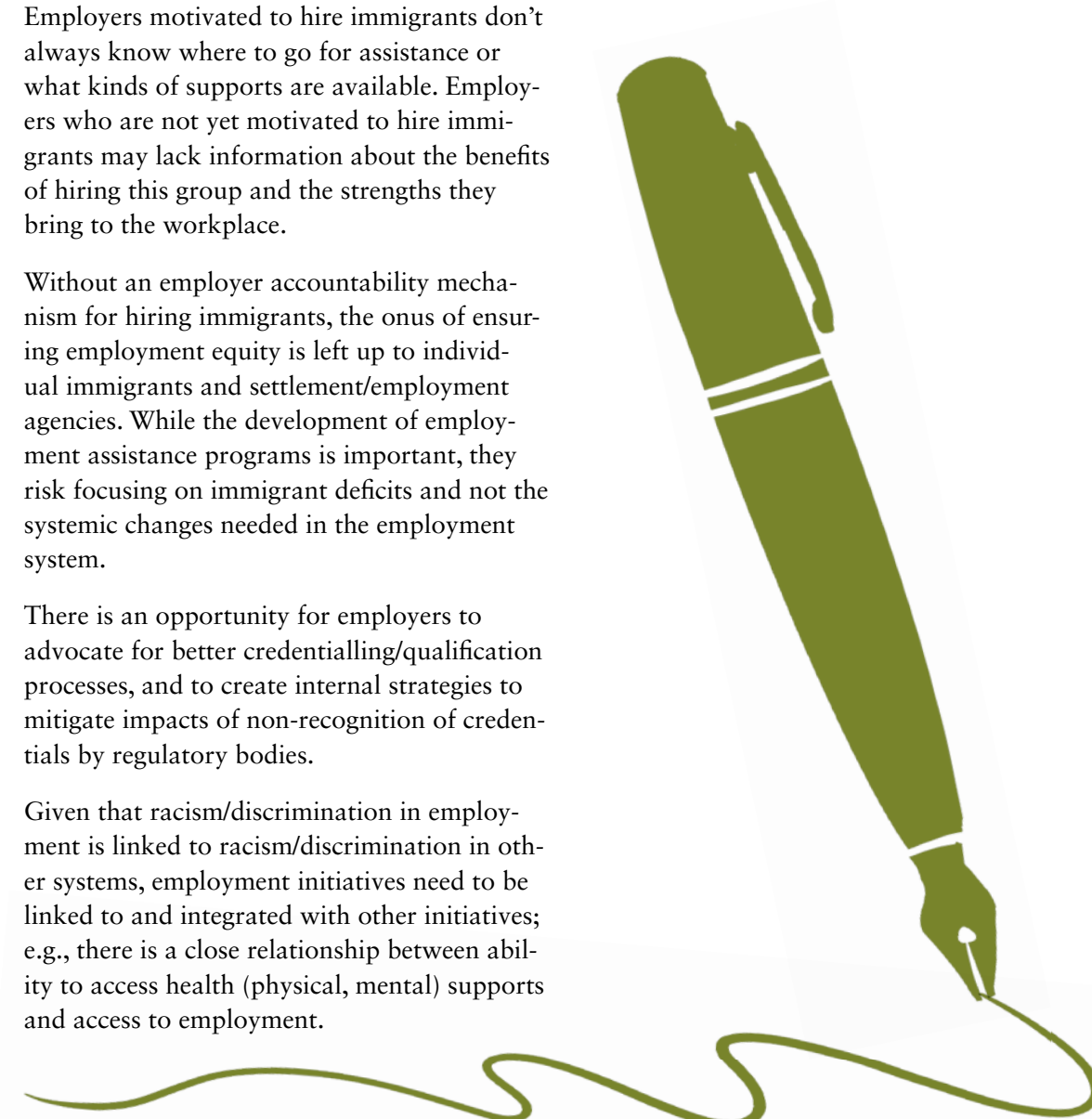
- Employers appreciated immigrants’ navigation of immigration- and citizenship-related systems. Employers associated immigrants’ success at overcoming immigration challenges to their resilience and ability to persist in the face of hardship, both of which they valued in immigrant employees.
- Employers noted that immigrants may not be as adept at navigating Canadian employment systems as they may not be aware of employment norms.
- Immigrants noted that it was very important to have connections with family, community, religious or other networks to help them navigate the Canadian employment system and find work.

### Implications

A number of implications emerge from the research findings:

- Employers who are motivated to hire immigrants are not tracking or measuring their success. Without robust data on immigrant hiring, promotion and retention, it is impossible to determine which practices are successful. Thus employer “best practices” cannot be identified.
- Immigrant status is not included in employment equity legislation and the lack of formal accountability for hiring immigrants has the potential to render this group invisible in employers’ efforts to create a diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace.
- Given that employers’ motivation to hire immigrants is largely driven by labour market needs, profitability, and, to a smaller extent, reputation, it may be important to utilize these factors to identify strategies to promote and encourage immigrant employment.

- The issue of employment challenges for immigrants is well known in the settlement sector but does not seem to be well understood by employers. As a result, employers may not understand the vulnerabilities experienced by immigrants in hiring processes and in the workplace. As a result, it is unlikely employers will actively develop inclusion strategies for this group.
- Employers motivated to hire immigrants don’t always know where to go for assistance or what kinds of supports are available. Employers who are not yet motivated to hire immigrants may lack information about the benefits of hiring this group and the strengths they bring to the workplace.
- Without an employer accountability mechanism for hiring immigrants, the onus of ensuring employment equity is left up to individual immigrants and settlement/employment agencies. While the development of employment assistance programs is important, they risk focusing on immigrant deficits and not the systemic changes needed in the employment system.
- There is an opportunity for employers to advocate for better credentialing/qualification processes, and to create internal strategies to mitigate impacts of non-recognition of credentials by regulatory bodies.
- Given that racism/discrimination in employment is linked to racism/discrimination in other systems, employment initiatives need to be linked to and integrated with other initiatives; e.g., there is a close relationship between ability to access health (physical, mental) supports and access to employment.





# Opportunities for Action

The following opportunities for action emerge from the research findings and implications:

## Additional Research

- Conduct additional research to further examine employer challenges and good practices for hiring/retaining immigrants. This research could include a larger number of employers and employers from the public sector to support sector comparisons. An international literature review could be included to identify any promising practices from other countries.
- Conduct research on the impacts of economic policies on immigrants, to bring additional context to employers' practices. This research might use an intersectional equity lens to explore the extent to which federal, provincial, and municipal economic policies consider the impacts of policies on immigrant employment and well-being.

## Supports for Immigrants

- Explore mechanisms, such as an information hub, to enable immigrants to obtain more/better information about the employment landscape in Canada before they leave their home countries (e.g., how long it will take to re-credential, costs, etc.).
- Develop and improve supports for immigrants' employment rights:
- Connect immigrants to education on worker rights.

- Provide information and one-on-one support for immigrant employees who want to make a human rights complaint or want to make a complaint to their employer.
- Connect TFWs to organizations that can support them. Identify needed enhancements to existing supports and implement changes to ensure this group is not exploited by employers.
- Explore the role of unions in ensuring equitable hiring and promotion of immigrants.
- Connect immigrants to organizations that assist with finding work, particularly immigrants who may not have familial and social networks in Canada. These organizations could:
- Provide information on reputable education programs.
- Inform immigrants about legitimate employment practices.
- Provide information on job opportunities and Canadian employment norms.
- Provide one-on-one support for employment applications.
- Connect immigrants to other organizations and supports to meet their specific needs beyond employment.
- Create paid internship programs for immigrants.

## Supports for Employers

- Create and/or enhance information available to employers who are motivated to hire, retain, and promote immigrants. This information mechanism should be a “one-stop shop” guide and/or website and should be widely promoted.
- Partner employers with specific agencies that specialize in hiring immigrants for a particular sector (e.g., engineering) or for specific immigrant groups (e.g., immigrants with disabilities, TFWs, etc.).
- Provide employers with information on the benefits of hiring immigrants and on demographics of immigrants (educational levels, professional qualifications, work experience in specific sectors, etc.).
- Create a network of immigrant-owned businesses that can champion hiring immigrants and support immigrant self-employment.
- Provide education for employers about equity as it relates to immigrant employees and other equity-denied groups. Include information on strategies for inclusion.
- Provide financial and other incentives for employers to hire immigrants. These may include wage subsidy programs, or free employer training and support when hiring immigrants.
- Provide support and incentives for employers to develop strategies and plans to hire immigrants.
- Create a network of employers that hire immigrants and support them to share strategies for addressing challenges. This could be done in partnership with settlement/employment agencies, the Chamber of Commerce, or other relevant organizations.



## Employer Accountability

- Create a mechanism for immigrants and other employees to report discrimination with a clear process to investigate these complaints and hold employers accountable.
- Develop a recognition program to celebrate employers who make efforts to recruit, retain, and promote immigrants.

## Appendix A: References for Literature Review

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## Appendix B: Interview and Focus Group Questions

### Interview Questions – Employers

1. Tell us a bit about your role and how you have been involved in hiring or promotion of immigrants.
2. Why is it important to you to try and hire immigrants? What strengths do immigrants bring to your company?
3. Does your company have an EDI plan or explicit targets to hire immigrants and/or other equity-seeking groups?
4. What are the kinds of things you, or your company, has done to try and hire immigrants?
  - What has worked?
  - How do you know it has worked?
  - How do you track and identify your progress or success in hiring and supporting immigrants and other equity-seeking groups? Do you collect disaggregated demographic information on employees?
  - What is challenging?
1. What kinds of things have you done to retain or promote immigrants once hired? What have you done to create a welcoming and inclusive culture in your company?

- What has worked?
  - What structural/policy changes have been made?
  - How do you know it has worked?
  - What is challenging?
2. What would be helpful to support you in hiring, retaining, or promoting immigrants?

### Focus Group Questions – Immigrants

1. What has been challenging in looking for employment?
2. What helped you to find employment?
3. When employed, what opportunities for promotion and advancement did you have?
4. In the jobs you’ve worked in, have workplaces been inclusive? What made them inclusive or not inclusive?
5. Why do you think employers should hire more immigrants? What strengths do you think they could contribute to workplaces?
6. What could employers do to hire and promote more immigrants?





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be found at [edmonton.ca/newcomers](https://edmonton.ca/newcomers)