Gaps in active measures programs among Black people in Canada

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) contracted the Social Research and
Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) to conduct a research project titled, Understanding
Participation Gaps in Active Employment and Skills Programs among Black People in Canada.
The objective of this research project was to contribute to a greater understanding of the
challenges faced by Black people in Canada related to participating in employment and skills
programs, as well as how policies, programs, and services can best support Black people in
Canada in their pursuit of a meaningful career. Due to the limited literature on the participation
of Black people in active employment and skills programs, the review has at times broadened the
discussion to include racialized people or drawn upon relevant contexts within the labour
market.

The project included four key parts: (1) a socio-demographic, skills, and employment profile of
Black people in Canada; (2) a literature review on active employment measures and their
effectiveness, both internationally and in Canada, based on academic and grey literature;
(3) a review of the barriers and facilitators to Black peoples' participation in active employment
and skills programs; (4) a scan of existing services, programs, and best practices related to active
employment and skills development specifically targeting Black people in Canada and
three interviews with program representatives. The following provides a summary of the
findings from each of these key parts, followed by key implications.

Socio-demographic, skills, and employment profile of Black people in Canada

The profile of Black people in Canada revealed a number of important points, as follows:

- Black people in Canada are a very diverse population in terms of history, ethnic and cultural
  origins, place of birth, religion, and language.

- Black people in Canada face ongoing inequities related to poverty, food security, housing,
  and health.

- Black people in Canada face higher unemployment rates and lower earnings when compared
  to Canadians overall as well as Canadians from other ethnic backgrounds.

- Black men and women in Canada tend to be less represented in management occupations
  compared to the rest of the working population.

Literature review on active employment measures and their effectiveness, both internationally and in Canada

The academic literature discusses active employment measures using the term Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs; Brisson, 2015; Fay, 1996; Martin & Grubb, 2001). ALMPs refer to a range of government interventions and programs aimed at reducing unemployment, improving the functioning of labour markets, and helping individuals find employment. These policies are called "active" because they involve direct interventions that actively influence the labour market, as opposed to passive policies that primarily provide income support to unemployed individuals without necessarily promoting reintegration into the workforce (Lalonde, 2003).

An international review on the effectiveness of active employment measures revealed mixed results. While some studies suggest positive outcomes such as improved employment rates and increased earnings among participants (e.g., Levy Yeyati et al., 2019), others find limited (e.g., Filges, Smedslund, Knudsen & Jørgensen, 2015) or even negative impacts (e.g., Crépon & van den Berg, 2016). Overall, while ALMPs have the potential to mitigate unemployment and improve labour market outcomes, their success depends on contextual factors and the tailored approach of each intervention.

In Canada, the largest and most significant ALMPs involve transfers of funding to the provinces and territories via Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) and Workforce Development Agreements (WDAs). The most recent LMDA and WDA evaluations (at the provincial and horizontal levels) from 2017 onwards demonstrate value for money in general (OECD, 2022); however, we found a notable absence of evidence regarding their effectiveness in improving labour market outcomes for Black people in Canada. Moreover, the evidence is also scarce for visible minorities as a broader group, as data is only available for a few programs funded under the two streams.

Overall, two notable gaps were identified in international and Canadian literature: (1) a lack of ALMPs explicitly tailored to address the needs of Black people, and (2) current programs and evaluations not reporting on outcomes for Black people.

Literature review on the barriers and facilitators to Black peoples' participation in active employment and skills programs

There are three main topics related to barriers and facilitators to Black peoples' participation in active employment and skills programs: (1) the impact of systemic racism and racial discrimination, and how culturally responsive practices can help to address these challenges, (2) access barriers and the use of tailored and flexible approaches to develop accessible programming, and (3) using mentorship approaches to address systems mistrust and mentoring.

It is clear in the literature that systemic racism persists as a deeply ingrained issue in Canadian society, including in the labour market. Moreover, it has been widely documented that Black people in Canada continue to face racial discrimination in hiring, career advancement, and equitable treatment in the workplace. Culturally responsive practices can address these inequities by ensuring leadership teams reflect Black communities, establishing culturally specific programs led by professionals sharing the same racial or ethnic background, involving Black communities in the design and evaluation of these programs, tailoring programs to reflect the cultural backgrounds and values of Black people in Canada, and implementing anti-racist policies with cultural competency training for staff.

Black people in Canada also experience access barriers to programs such as limited awareness of and information about available programs and opportunities, economic disparities and financial challenges, language barriers, and insufficient communication hindering their access to employment and training programs. Offering accessible programming tailored to the needs of Black people in Canada is crucial for reducing barriers to access (Future Skills Council, 2020). Accessible programs can include wrap-around supports such as financial assistance, transportation subsidies, childcare services, technology access, and other measures to alleviate barriers and ensure equitable program access.

Finally, given the detrimental effects of systemic racism and racial discrimination, the experiences of Black people in Canada may lead to mistrust of government agencies, educational institutions, and employers, and diminish their willingness to participate in active employment and skills programs (Cukier et al., 2023; Gariba, 2009). To answer these issues related to trust, there is consensus in the literature that mentoring plays a crucial role and should be considered as a key element of programming (Basra, 2021; Briggs, 2019; Brown, 2021; Edem, 2023; Gariba, 2009; Ogbuagu, 2012).

By addressing the different barriers and implementing facilitators, active employment and skills programs can better support the participation and success of Black people in Canada, contributing to greater equity and inclusivity in the labour market.

Existing services, programs, and best practices related to active employment and skills development specifically targeting Black people in Canada

There are a variety of services and programs available at the federal, provincial, and community levels that focus on active employment and skills development for Black people in Canada. The project conducted three interviews with representatives from three community-based organizations identified through the scan. Themes emerging from these interviews closely paralleled the findings of our literature review. Interviewees highlighted barriers such as racism and discrimination, particularly discrimination in call-backs due to seeing a Black name in a CV,

alongside a lack of awareness about available services and programs and a notable absence of Black representation within these services and programs. On the other side, facilitators included mentorship, networking opportunities, and funding support for skills development and certification. It is intriguing to note that all three organizations heavily depended on collaboration with other community organizations to engage with Black Canadians effectively. The primary strategy involved close partnerships with Black-led community-based organizations.

Key implications

This report proposes several considerations related to the implementation of culturally responsive practices, the provision of accessible training and skill development programs, and the establishment of mentorship and support networks. In essence, these recommendations point to the need for initiatives to be led by Black communities for active measures programming to truly respond to the needs of Black communities.

Culturally responsive programming

- Ensure that organizations offering employment support have leadership teams reflecting Black communities.

- Establish programs led by professionals that are representative of the communities they serve (e.g., program staff and management sharing racial, ethnic, or cultural background of the participants).

- Tailor programs to reflect the cultural backgrounds, values, and experiences of Black people in Canada, while being mindful of the diversity within Black communities (e.g., culturally appropriate foods and beverages during program events or gatherings, celebrations of significant cultural events and holidays such as Black History Month, including elements of Black art, music, and literature, etc.).

- Consult meaningfully and involve Black communities in training and employment program design, program practices and policies, and evaluation.

- Implement anti-racist policies including clear procedures for reporting and addressing instances of racism and discrimination.

- Train program staff on cultural safety, including training on unconscious bias to increase awareness of racial and ethnic diversity and mitigate the impact of implicit biases in decision-making processes.

- Actively combat discrimination within program structures including reporting mechanisms, accountability procedures when racism and discrimination happen, and support and resources for individuals who have experienced racism and discrimination.

- Stay mindful of the burden carried by Black communities and acknowledge their efforts and the time invested in co-development (e.g., through paid positions, wages, honorariums, etc.).

Accessible programs

- Raise awareness about the existence and importance of employment and training programs such as providing information about their goals, eligibility criteria, and benefits.

- Foster close collaboration between community leaders and Black individuals in designing programs and initiatives.

- Strive for a balance between tailored support for Black individuals and other racial or ethnic groups, ensuring mitigation against further social exclusion.

- Forge connections with other organizations to facilitate networking with employers and improve labour market access.

- Include wrap-around supports such as financial assistance, transportation subsidies, childcare services, technology access, and other measures to alleviate barriers and ensure equitable program access.

- Value Black people as active participants in program design, implementation, and evaluation processes to foster ownership, accountability, and sustainable outcomes for Black participants.

Mentoring and support networks

- Consider mentoring as a key element of programming.

- Enhance existing bridging networks and develop new ones within Black communities.

- Actively involve youth in planning services and provide skills training for data analysis to improve program outcomes.

- Implement fair employment criteria and coordinate job search assistance, including gender-specific skills programs.

- Educate employers on hiring practices and facilitate workplace integration through
  mentoring programs.

- Foster support in high schools, community organizations, and post-secondary education job
  training programs aimed at preparing individuals for the workforce.

- Emphasize mentoring as an empowerment mechanism that enhances labour market
  progression by expanding networks, refining job search skills, fostering confidence, and
  equipping individuals with culturally relevant skills.

- Collaborate with Black community organizations, leaders, and stakeholders to improve
  outreach, trust, and participation rates among Black people in Canada.

- Include the voices of employers in these collaborations.

In addition to the above, the report's findings hold broader implications for policy formulation
and program development.

Key additional considerations for policy and program development

- Consider targeted interventions that address the cycle of social exclusion and its
  consequences, including disproportionate representation of Black people in correctional
  facilities in Canada.

- Implement policies and initiatives that dismantle discriminatory practices, promote diversity
  and inclusion in workplaces and educational institutions, and invest in community-based
  programs that provide support and resources to marginalized communities.

- Ensure equal access to resources such as education, healthcare, affordable housing,
  childcare, and transportation.

- Invest in underprivileged communities through targeted economic development initiatives
  and infrastructure investments.

- Collect race-based data to identify and tackle existing inequalities in active employment
  measures.

- Invest in reskilling initiatives that foster an inclusive approach to workforce development
  and responds to current labour trends such as increased automation, the transition to a
  green autonomy, and the influence of AI.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this research project was to contribute to a greater understanding of the challenges faced by Black people in Canada related to participating in employment and skills programs, as well as how policies, programs, and services can best support Black people in Canada in their pursuit of a meaningful career. It was conducted in support of advancing Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC) development of more inclusive and equitable active employment and skills programming. In Canada, this includes federal programming delivered under Employment Insurance (EI) Part II via Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) and Workforce Development Agreements (WDAs) with the provinces and territories.

Throughout this review, our primary focus was on examining evidence that sheds light on the unique experiences of Black people in Canada. However, we also considered evidence pertaining to visible minorities and other vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, recognizing that while their representation in the literature is more substantial, it also remains limited in scope.

The project included an environmental scan of academic and grey literature and interviews with several representatives of programs that provide employment support or skills development for Black people in Canada. The scan drew on both Canadian and international studies and applied a Gender-Based Analysis Plus (or intersectional) lens to capture the intersections between race, gender, and other social identities.

This report is organized as follows:

- **Section 1**: Research objectives and methodology

- **Section 2**: Key findings

    o Socio-demographic, skills, and employment profile of Black people in Canada

    o Research review on active employment measures

    o Barriers and facilitators to Black peoples' participation in active employment and skills programs

    o Current active employment and skills programs that target Black people in Canada

- **Section 3**: Key implications

- **Section 4**: Conclusions

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study examined the barriers that Black people in Canada face accessing active skills development and employment programming. The following were the key areas of focus for this research project:

- What is the socio-demographic, skills, and employment profile of Black people in Canada?

- What barriers do Black and other racialized people in Canada face accessing active measures programming?

- What are Canadian and international best practices for improving the participation of Black and other racialized people in active measures programming?

- What recommendations can be proposed to provide more equitable and inclusive active measures programming for Black and other racialized people in Canada?

METHODOLOGY

This study involved a targeted literature review and environmental scan that identified and reviewed published academic literature, reports from think tanks and other non-governmental organizations, and government documents (i.e., evaluations and other analytical reports. Although focused primarily on Canada, the study also included international promising practices including the US, UK, European Union, and Australia.

To the extent feasible given available data, the research applied a Gender-Based Analysis Plus lens, exploring how the experiences of Black people in Canada intersect with and are compounded by other identity factors (i.e., class, race, gender). This included seeking out literature on how identity shapes how Black people in Canada engage with active employment and training programs.

The literature scan used Google Scholar and the general Google search engine, utilizing the following search terms in various combinations (see Table 1).

Table 1   Sample search terms

Domain	Search Terms
Racial identity	"Black" OR "Black adult*" OR "Black youth" OR "racialized" OR "visible minority*"
Barriers/facilitators	"Barrier" OR "facilitator" OR "access" OR "participant"
Active Employment Measures	"active labour market policy" OR "employment measure" OR "employment program" OR "training program" OR "skills program" OR "employment" OR "training" OR "social service*"

The ESDC team supporting this project also provided several resources and relevant ESDC reports were consulted as well.

The scan also identified current employment and skills training programs and supports that specifically target Black Canadians. These resources were identified through Google using the following keywords: "employment programs Black people in Canada," "training programs Black people in Canada," "skills programs Black people in Canada," "employment Black people in Canada," "training Black people in Canada." This was then supplemented by three interviews with representatives of programs that support the employment and skills development of Black people in Canada. The purpose of the interviews was to gain a better understanding of these specific programs as well as broader trends, challenges, and gaps in service.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC, SKILLS, AND EMPLOYMENT PROFILE OF BLACK PEOPLE IN CANADA

The purpose of this section is to facilitate a deeper understanding of the socio-demographic, skills, and employment outcomes experienced by Black people in Canada to help ensure that active employment programs are responsive to their needs. When reading this section, it is important to consider the historical legacy of systemic racist and exclusionary practices that have profoundly shaped and impacted the lives of Black people in Canada. This includes a lack of employment opportunities, career advancement, citizenship, and confinement to underemployment and precarious work (Briggs, 2019). It is also important to understand that this section provides a particular snapshot of the lives of Black people in Canada and does not intend to demonstrate the full complexity and diversity of Black peoples' experiences.

Ethnicity and population

It is first critical to note that Black people in Canada are a very diverse population in terms of history, ethnic and cultural origins, place of birth, religion, and language. To provide a sense of this diversity, Figure 1 outlines the reported ethnic origins of Black people in Canada. 'Jamaican' was the most frequently reported origin, followed by 'other African origin' (country not specified) and 'Haitian.' Other frequently reported origins included 'Canadian,' 'English,' 'Somali,' 'Nigerian,' 'French,' 'Ethiopian,' and 'Scottish.' Approximately 30 per cent of the Black population reported more than one ethnic origin (Statistics Canada, 2019).

**Figure 1   Ethnic origins (single and multiple responses) most often reported by the
Black population, Canada, 2016**
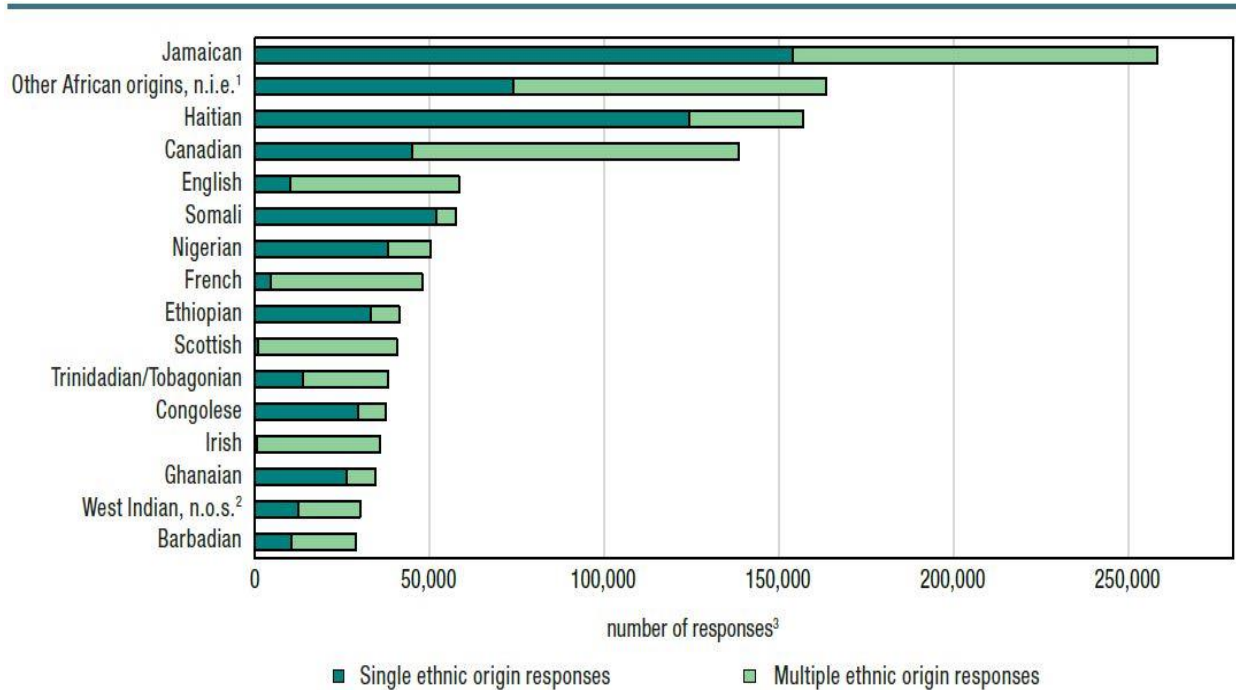
1. "Other African origins, not included elsewhere" includes mostly general responses (e.g., 'African'), as well as a few more specific African responses (e.g., 'Saharan') that have
not been included elsewhere in the ethnic origin classification.
2. The abbreviation "n.o.s." means not otherwise specified.
3. The sum of the ethnic origins is greater than the total population because a person can report more than one ethnic origin in the census questionnaire.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2019.

As shown in 0, there is a much higher percentage of first- and second-generation Black people in
Canada compared to the total Canadian population. Only 8.6 per cent of Black people in Canada
are third-generation compared to 58.4 per cent of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2019).

Figure 2   Distribution of the Black and total populations by generation status, Canada, 2016
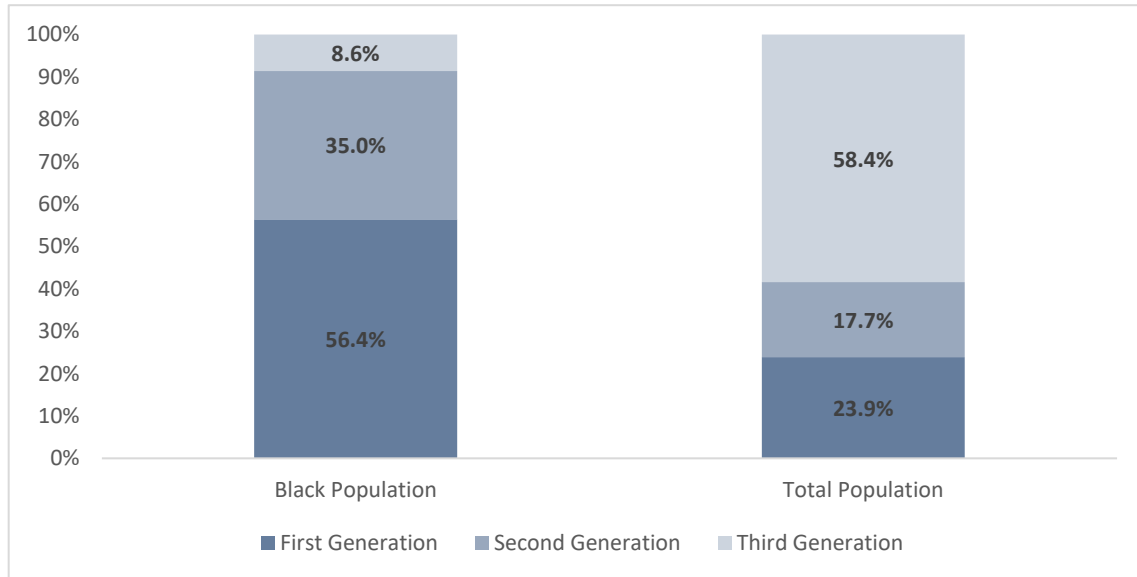
Source: Statistics Canada, 2019.

The regions from which Black people in Canada immigrated have changed significantly over time. Long-established Black immigrants are mostly from the Caribbean, whereas recent immigrants are predominantly from Africa (see 0). According to the 2016 Census, more than half (56.7 per cent) of Black immigrants who came to Canada before 1981 were born in Jamaica and Haiti, whereas Black newcomers now come from over 125 different countries (Statistics Canada, 2019).

Figure 3   **Region of birth of Black immigrants by period of immigration, Canada, 2016**
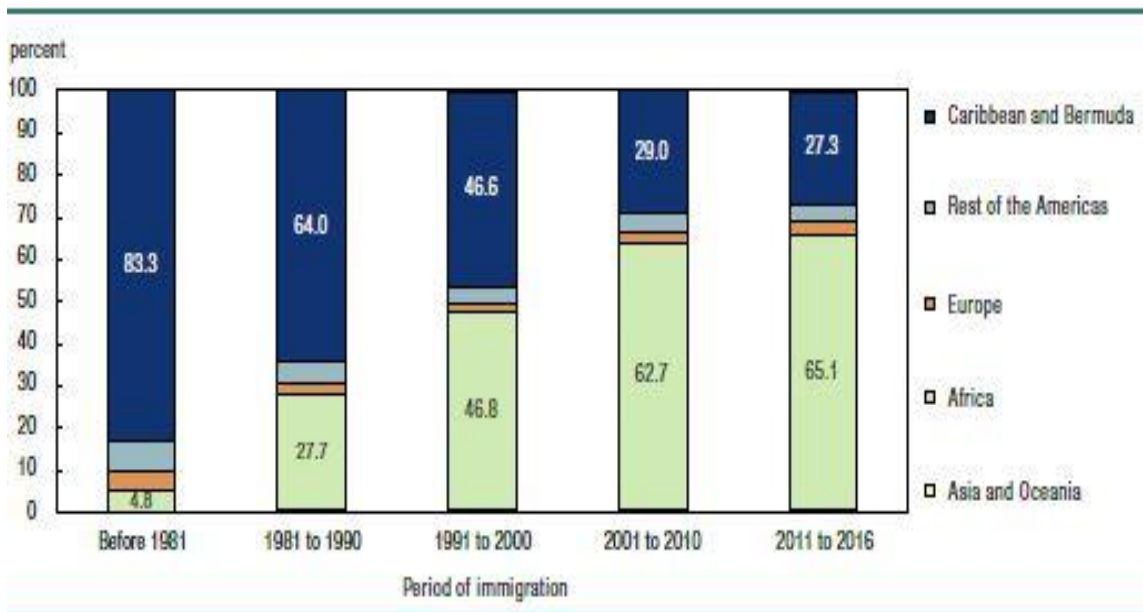
Source: Statistics Canada, 2019.

According to the 2016 census, English was the mother tongue of more than half of the Black population (59.8 per cent), while French was the mother tongue of 19.6 per cent. Other most frequently reported languages included Creole, Somali, Amharic, and Niger-Congo languages. Overall, Black people in Canada reported more than 100 languages as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2019).

Over the past two and a half decades, the Black population in Canada has experienced substantial growth and has more than doubled to reach 1.5 million in 2021 (see Figure 4). Currently, Black people in Canada represent approximately 3.5 per cent of Canada's total population, including the 15.6 per cent of Canadians that identified as a visible minority. Further, according to Statistics Canada's population projections, the Black population is expected to continue to grow and could represent over five per cent of the total Canadian population by 2036 (Statistics Canada, 2017). Notably, the Black population in Canada skews younger than the country's overall demographic, with a median age of 29.6 years compared to the total population's median age of 40.7 years (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Figure 4   **Black people in Canada Population, 1996-2021**
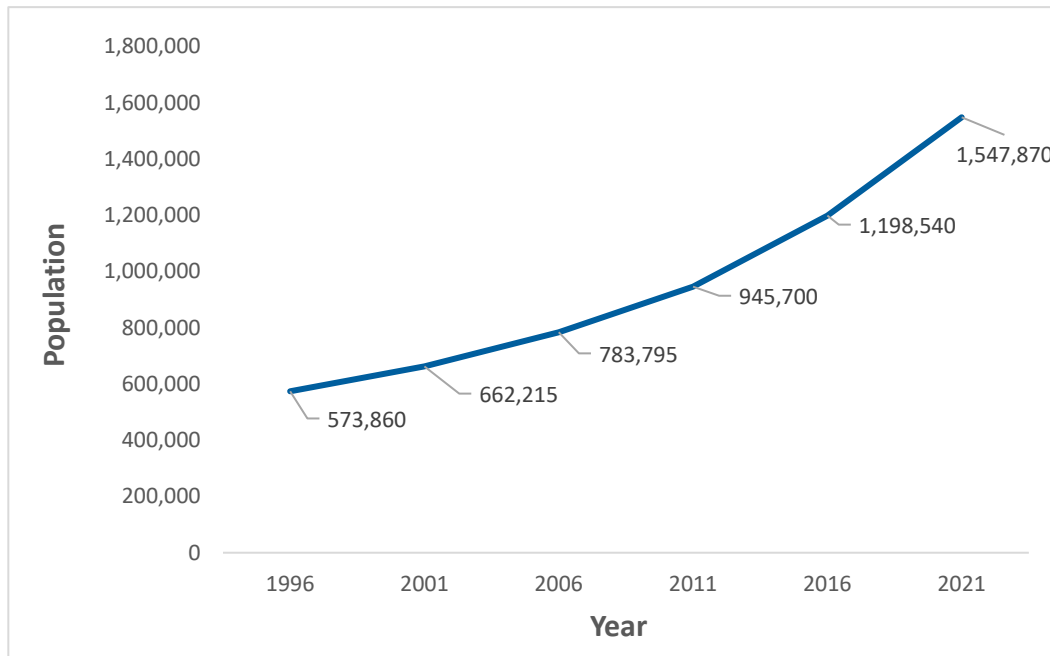
Source: Canadian Census, 1996-2021.

Education

According to 2021 census data (Statistics Canada, 2023), the proportion of the Black population with a Bachelor's degree or higher (32.4 per cent) was similar to the national average (32.9 per cent). While Black men (43.3 per cent) and women (42.3 per cent) aged 25 to 54 were equally likely to have a university degree, a higher proportion of white women had a university degree (39.1 per cent) compared with white men (28.4 per cent; Statistics Canada, 2021).

However, there are significant differences in educational attainment within the Black population – those with African origins have well above average educational attainment, while Black people with Canadian-born parents face education gaps (see Figure 5). The achievement of a Bachelor's degree or higher was highest among Black people in Canada born in Africa and among their children (at over 40 per cent) and lowest for Black people in Canada born in the Caribbean (19.4 per cent), although the share among their children (28.5 per cent) was higher and closer to the average for the Canadian population as a whole (32.9 per cent) (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Figure 5   Bachelor's degree or higher by generation and total population
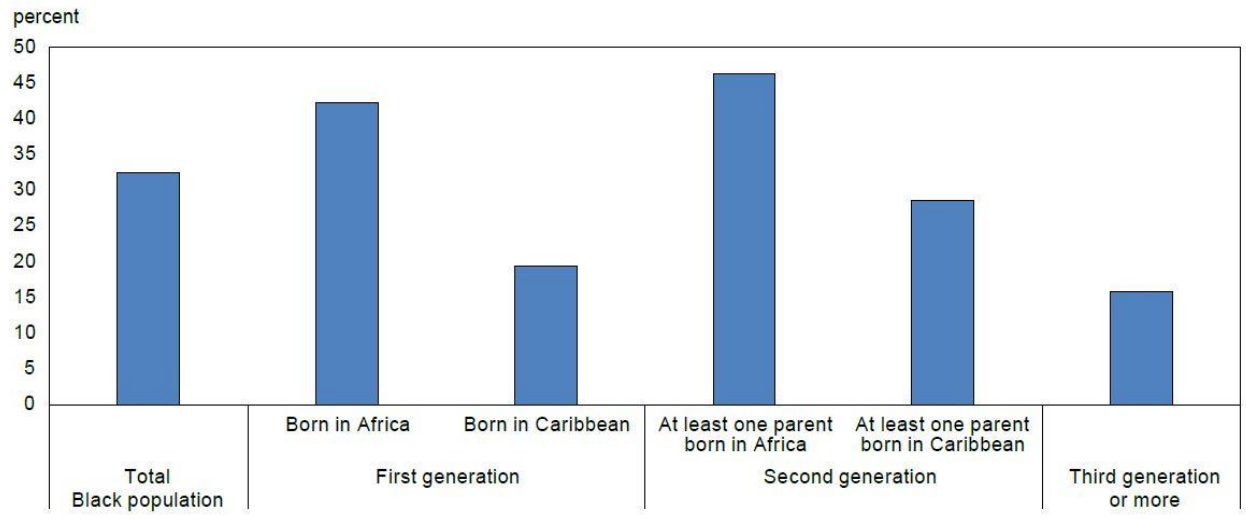
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2023.

The proportion of the third-generation-or-more Black population with a bachelor's degree or higher was lower than first- and second-generation immigrants, at 15.8 per cent (Statistics Canada, 2023). In terms of youth, the proportion of Black men aged 23-27 not in school or unemployed was almost twice as high as that of their white counterparts (20 per cent vs. 12 per cent; Statistics Canada, 2023). As will be discussed later in this report, systemic racism may affect Black peoples' access to quality education, which is essential for acquiring the skills and qualifications necessary for employment.

Employment, income, and occupation

Black people in Canada face higher unemployment rates (see Figure 6) and lower earnings (see 0) when compared to Canadians overall as well as Canadians from other ethnic backgrounds. In 2023, the unemployment rate for Black people in Canada was 9 per cent compared to 5.4 percent for the total population and Black people in Canada had the second-highest unemployment rate of Canadians with other ethnic backgrounds. Black males experienced a lower unemployment rate compared to Black females (8.5 per cent compared to 9.4 per cent; Statistics Canada, 2023).

Figure 6   **2023 Unemployment rate by visible minority population group and total population (percentage)**
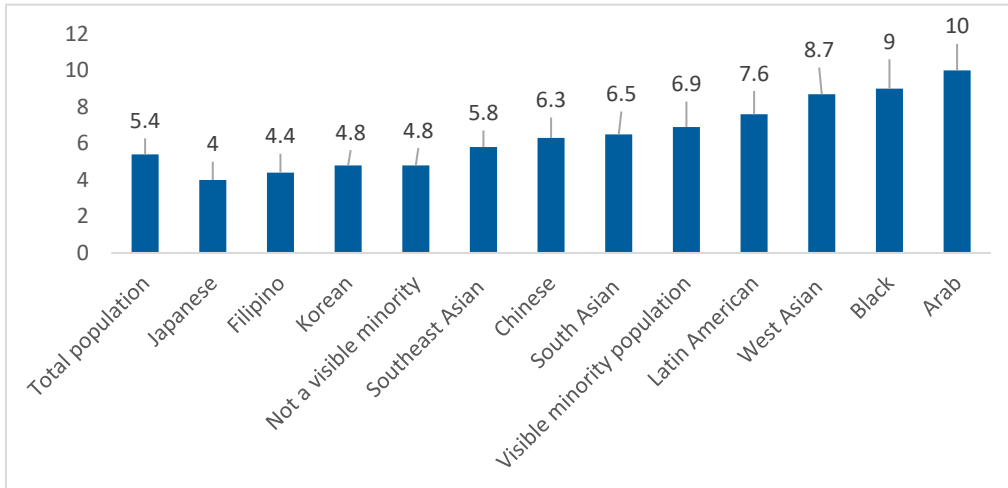
Source: Statistics Canada, 2023.

As depicted in 0, between 2000 and 2015, the median annual wages in the general population had a steady increase from $52,000 to around $55,000, whereas it remained almost the same for Black men at around $40,000. In contrast, Black women earned median annual wages comparable to those of women in the broader population in the early 2000s (Do et al., 2020).

Figure 7   **Median annual wages among Black and non-Black workers aged
25-59 years, by gender, Canada, 2000-2015**
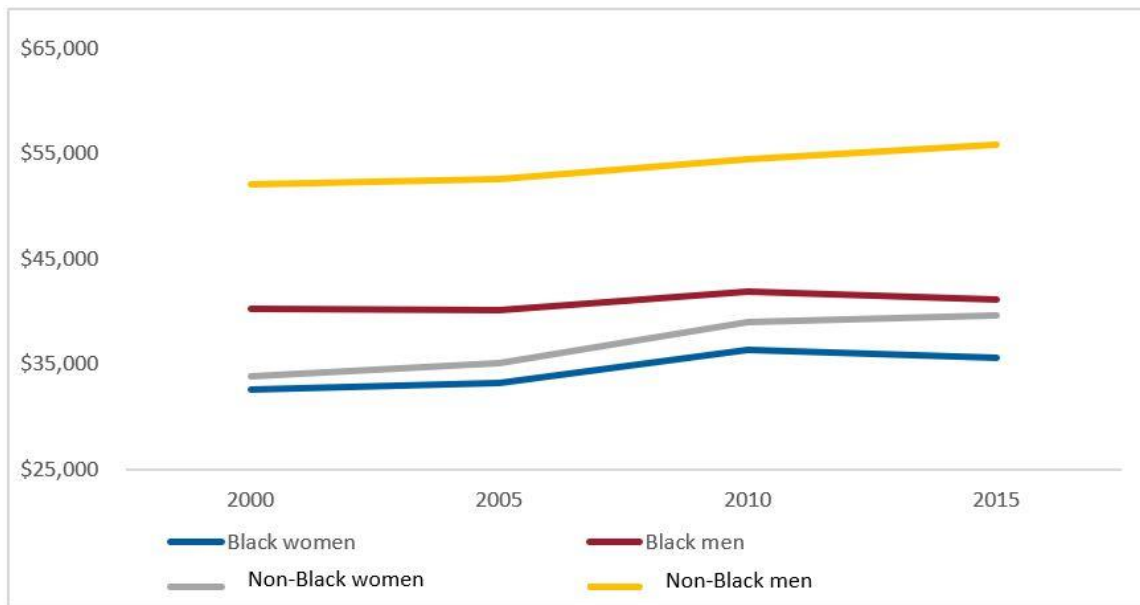
Note: Wages are expressed in 2015 constant dollars. It includes wages, salaries, or commissions, but it excludes self-employment income. The median is the level of income at which half of the population has higher income and half has lower.
Source: Statistics Canada, censuses of population 2001, 2006 and 2016; 2011 National Household Survey.

There are also notable differences by occupation:

- Black men were about 40 per cent less likely to work in management occupations than white men (6.3 per cent compared with 11.3 per cent). Employed Black women were also underrepresented in management occupations (4.3 per cent) compared with white women (6.9 per cent).

- Black people in Canada who are employed (9.1 per cent) were less likely to be self-employed than white Canadians (13.6 per cent). At the same time, the self-employment rate among Black men (12.0 per cent) was nearly twice as high as the rate for Black women (6.1 per cent) (Statistics Canada, 2021).

- As shown in Figure 8, Black female workers were mostly concentrated in the health care and social assistance sector, as 33 per cent of them had a job in this sector—12 percentage points more than the rest of the employed female population (21 per cent). Among immigrant women, this gap was even wider (18 percentage points) as 37 per cent of Black immigrant women worked in the health care and social assistance sector, compared with 19 per cent of other immigrant women (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Figure 8   **Distribution of Black and non-Black workers aged 25 to 59 years by industry and gender, Canada, 2016**
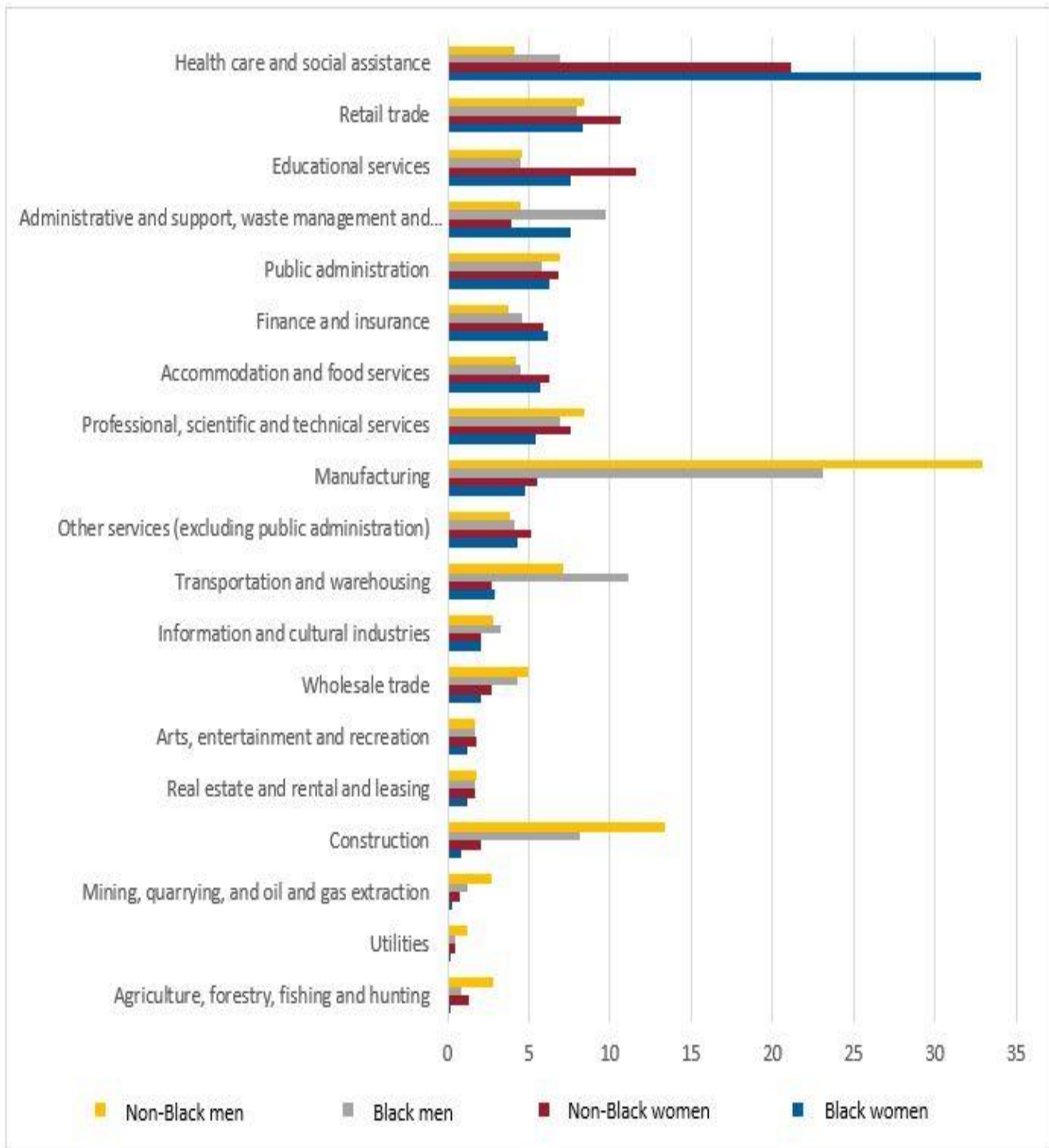
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.

Social and health outcomes

The following section provides some social and health outcome data on Black people in Canada related to poverty, food, housing, health, and the criminal justice system. It should be emphasized, however, that the relationship between employment and social/health outcomes is not linear – worse employment outcomes do lead to worse social/health outcomes, but the reverse can also occur. For example, poverty and food insecurity make it harder for kids to learn, which can then lead to lower educational attainment and poorer labour market outcomes, which in turn leads to poverty. Thus, the relationship between employment and broader social/health outcomes is dynamic and can be mutually reinforcing. A later section in this report discusses this process as related to the relationship between employment, education, and the criminal justice system.

Poverty

- In 2011, Black people in Canada were 2.2 times as likely to be among the working poor[1] as white people in Canada (see Figure 9). Furthermore, Black people in Canada who were recent immigrants (≤ 10 years in Canada) were 2.6 times as likely to be among the working poor compared to the Canadian-born white population (Government of Canada, 2020).

- In 2016, 21 per cent of the Black population aged 25 to 59 lived in a low-income situation, compared with 12 per cent in the total population. Similarly, 27 per cent of Black children were living in a low-income situation, compared to 14 per cent of children in the total population (Statistics Canada, 2020).

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[1] Working poor' is defined as earning at least $3 000 per year, but their after-tax income is below the low-income measure, which is defined as a fixed percentage (50%) of median adjusted household income. The population of working poor excludes students and those living with their family of origin (Government of Canada, 2020).

Figure 9   Working poor adults (18–64 years), age-standardized rate (per cent), Canada

	Non-immigrant White	Non-immigrant Black	Long-term immigrant White	Long-term immigrant Black	Recent immigrant White	Recent immigrant Black
Males	6.2	9.5 E.	6.3 E.	11.8	10.5	16.9
Female	6.8	13.4	8.0	10.8	9.9	16.8
Both Sexes	6.5	11.6	8.2	113	10.3	16.7
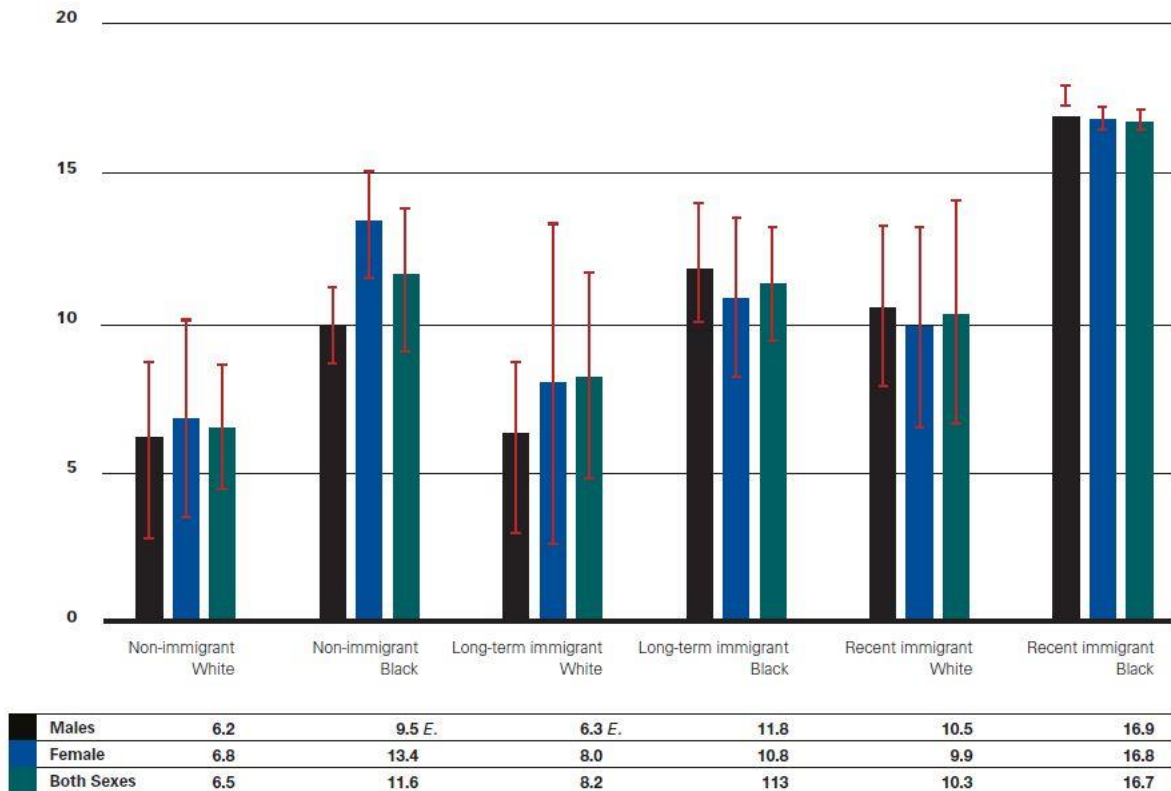
E. interpret with caution, as the measure itself or at least one of the components
used to calculate the value has a coefficient of variation between 16.6 to 33.3%.

Source: Government of Canada, 2020.

Food security

▪ Between 2009 and 2012, Black people in Canada reported moderate or severe household
food insecurity 2.8 times more often than white people in Canada (Government of Canada,
2020).

▪ Black people in Canada youth aged 12–17 reported moderate or severe household food
insecurity 3.0 times more often than white people in Canada (Government of Canada, 2020).

Housing

- In 2016, 20.6 per cent of Black people in Canada reported living in housing below standards (i.e., housing costs are more than they can afford, and/or is crowded, and/or requires major repairs) compared to 7.7 per cent of white people in Canada (Government of Canada, 2020).

- In 2016, Black people in Canada had the lowest homeownership rate among all groups in Canada (44.5 per cent). Canada had an overall homeownership rate of 72.61%.

Health

Between 2010 and 2013,

- 14.2 per cent of Black people in Canada aged 18 years and older reported their health to be fair or poor, compared to 11.3 per cent of white people in Canada. The prevalence of fair or poor health for Black women reached 15.0 per cent.

- 64.0 per cent of young Black women aged 12–17 reported their mental health to be 'excellent or very good' compared to 77.2 per cent of young white women.

- The prevalence of diabetes among Black adults was 2.1 times the rate among white adults.

- 40.8 per cent of Black people in Canada aged 18 years and older reported being active or moderately active, compared to 54.2 per cent of white people in Canada.

- Black people in Canada also reported positive health behaviours, including significantly lower rates of heavy alcohol use and smoking compared to white people in Canada (Government of Canada, 2020).

Criminal justice system

- Black people in Canada accounted for 13 per cent of all homicide victims in 2022, which is three times higher than the Canadian population (4 per cent) (Statistics Canada, 2023b).

- In 2020/2021, Black people in Canada accounted for 9 per cent of the total offender population in federal corrections despite representing about 4 per cent of adults in Canada, (Justice Canada, 2022).

- In 2019, 18 per cent of Black people in Canada reported having "not very much" or "no" confidence in the police compared to more than double the proportion among the white population (8%) (Ibrahim, 2020).

As we mentioned at the beginning of this section, these inequities experienced by Black people in Canada do not derive from the inherent characteristics of the Black population, but rather from the structural, systemic, and interpersonal racism and discrimination that has both historic and current constructions. This will be discussed in detail in a later section of this report.

WHAT ARE ACTIVE EMPLOYMENT MEASURES?

The academic literature discusses active employment measures using the term Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs; Brisson, 2015; Fay, 1996; Martin & Grubb, 2001). ALMPs refer to a range of government interventions and programs aimed at reducing unemployment, improving the functioning of labour markets, and helping individuals find employment. These policies are called "active" because they involve direct interventions that actively influence the labour market, as opposed to passive policies that primarily provide income support to unemployed individuals without necessarily promoting reintegration into the workforce (Lalonde, 2003).

The following section provides a background on ALMPs including a brief history, purpose, and target populations, as well as common programs. It will then examine the effectiveness of ALMPs based on an international review. Subsequently, ALMPs in Canada will be discussed, including an overview of Labour Market and Workforce Development Agreements, and their evaluations. By analyzing the key programs and outcomes of ALMPs, this section aims to illustrate their role in shaping labour market dynamics and promoting inclusive employment and training opportunities for Black people in Canada specifically.

Background on active labour market policies

Bonoli (2010) provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of ALMPs, highlighting their cyclical adoption in response to economic challenges and labour market shocks. Originating as a response to the Great Depression, ALMPs gained significant momentum in the post-World War II era, notably with initiatives such as the New Deal in the United States. The influential Rehn-Meidner model, pioneered in Sweden by Meidner and Rehn (1953), further solidified ALMPs by prioritizing industry modernization and workforce retraining.

Over subsequent decades, ALMPs evolved to address various labour market dynamics, from mitigating labour shortages in the 1950s and 1960s to combating economic downturns in the 1970s and 1990s. Their resurgence following the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-2009 underscored their enduring relevance in times of crisis. Notably, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the OECD (2021) emphasized the importance of maintaining flexible and responsive ALMPs, directing efforts towards training strategies that facilitate labour reassignment and support economic restructuring.

Throughout these shifts and various economic shocks, ALMPs have evolved. However, the objective of ALMPs has been constant – directing attention towards the unemployed and increasing employment within this demographic (Card, Kluve, & Weber, 2010). In the current global context, ALMPs typically intervene in the following ways (Estevão, 2003; Lalonde, 2003):

- To reduce unemployment by helping job seekers find suitable employment opportunities through training, job search assistance, and other support services;

- To promote economic growth by reducing unemployment and increasing workforce participation;

- To enhance labour market flexibility by facilitating the reallocation of workers to industries and occupations where there is a higher demand for labour;

- To improve human capital by investing in training and skill development;

- To address structural unemployment and mismatches between job seekers' skills and qualifications and the requirements of available jobs, in concert with employers;

- To reduce social welfare dependency by promoting self-sufficiency and economic independence among unemployed individuals; and

- To foster social inclusion by providing support to vulnerable groups, such as long-term unemployed individuals, youth, and individuals with disabilities.

While ALMPs typically target disadvantaged groups in their efforts to foster social inclusion, it is pertinent to highlight that the definition of disadvantaged or vulnerable groups has not consistently included Black or other racialized individuals. For example, in Dutta-Gupta, Grant, Eckel, and Edelman (2016), 'disadvantaged groups' supported by subsidized employment programs in the US included disconnected youth, people with work-limiting disabilities, single mothers and non-custodial parents, people with criminal records, older workers who have been pushed out of the labour market due to economic dislocation, disadvantaged immigrants (especially refugees and asylum seekers), long-term unemployed workers, people in areas of particularly high unemployment, and people experiencing homelessness.

Although not specified in the ALMP literature, disadvantaged or vulnerable groups may include individuals who identify as Black. Based on extensive research on Black individuals facing multiple barriers to socio-economic growth, there are many Black individuals who experience compounded challenges due to factors such as race, socio-economic status, education level, access to resources, and systemic discrimination (e.g., Banting & Thompson, 2021). These intersecting disadvantages can create complex barriers to economic advancement, making it

crucial to address the specific needs and experiences of Black individuals within broader discussions of disadvantage and inequality.

Although ALMPs may support Black people, the outcomes they experience throughout these programs are aggregated and reported through the subgroup of "visible minorities" (e.g., ESDC, 2022A), which in Canada is defined as a person "other than an Indigenous person who is non-white in colour/race, regardless of place of birth. The visible minority group includes Black, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, South Asian-East, East Indian, East African, Southeast Asian (non-white West Asian), North African or Arab, non-white Latin America, person of mixed origin, and other visible minority groups" (Government of Canada, 2016). It is thus not possible to understand the specific experiences of Black people in Canada who participate in federally funded ALMPs[2] through data currently collected and reported by the federal government. However, the Government of Canada has made a public commitment to modernize the Employment Equity Act, part of which involves the introduction of new designated groups, notably including Black individuals.[3]

In this context and through our literature review, we identified two notable gaps: (1) there is a lack of ALMPs explicitly tailored to address the needs of Black people, and (2) current programs and evaluations do not report on outcomes for Black people. These oversights underscore the importance of addressing racial disparities within ALMP frameworks to ensure equitable access and outcomes for all marginalized communities, including Black individuals in Canada.

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[2]   Although the Government of Canada funds ALMPs, provinces/territories and other groups typically deliver the services and determine the priorities for that funding.

[3]   See Minister O'Regan receives Task Force report on Employment Equity Act modernization at https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2023/12/minister-oregan-receives-task-force-report-on-employment-equity-act-modernization.html

Most common ALMP programs (Martin, 1998; Lalonde, 2003):

Training and Skill Development Programs: These initiatives aim to enhance the employability of job seekers by providing them with training in specific skills demanded by the labour market. This can include vocational training, apprenticeships, and retraining programs to help workers transition to new industries or occupations.

Job Search Assistance: Governments may provide services to help job seekers find suitable employment opportunities more efficiently. This could involve job matching services, career counselling, job fairs, and assistance with resume writing and interview skills.

Subsidized Employment: In subsidized employment programs, employers receive financial incentives or subsidies to hire unemployed individuals. These programs aim to create job opportunities for the unemployed while reducing the financial burden on employers.

Workfare Programs: Workfare combines elements of welfare and work by requiring unemployed individuals to participate in work-related activities, such as community service or public works projects, in exchange for receiving welfare benefits. The goal is to encourage work participation and provide valuable work experience.

Wage Subsidies: Wage subsidy programs provide financial incentives to employers who hire individuals facing barriers to employment, such as long-term unemployment, disabilities, or lack of skills. Subsidies may cover a portion of the employee's wages for a specified period to encourage employers to hire these individuals.

Entrepreneurship Support: Some ALMPs focus on promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment as a pathway to employment. These initiatives may offer training, mentoring, access to capital, and other forms of support to aspiring entrepreneurs.

Public Employment Services (PES): Public employment services play a central role in implementing and coordinating ALMPs. They provide a range of services to both job seekers and employers, including job placement assistance, labour market information, and support in implementing ALMPs.

Effectiveness of active labour market policies – An international review

A historical perspective on assessing the effectiveness of ALMPs

Generally, international research on the effectiveness of ALMPs indicates mixed results. While some studies suggest positive outcomes such as improved employment rates and increased earnings among participants (e.g., Levy Yeyati et al., 2019), others find limited (e.g., Filges, Smedslund, Knudsen, & Jørgensen, 2015) or even negative impacts (e.g., Crépon & van den Berg, 2016). Overall, while ALMPs have the potential to mitigate unemployment and improve labour market outcomes, their success depends on various contextual factors and the tailored approach of each intervention, which point to the potential importance of targeted programming for Black people in Canada. We provide here a summary of the literature on the mixed evidence on the effectiveness of ALMPs.

Multiple studies in the early 2000s have reviewed the impact of ALMPs (Heckman et al., 1999; Kluve & Schmidt, 2002; Martin, 2000; Martin & Grubb, 2001). However, these have been criticized for not engaging in rigorous systematic methodologies (Filges, Smedslund, Knudsen, & Jørgensen, 2015). A more systematic trend started in 2010 with meta-analyses from Card, Kluve, and Weber (2010) and Kluve (2010). Including studies from many countries throughout the world, Card et al. (2010) found that job search assistance programs generally yielded positive impacts,[4] while subsidized public sector employment had less favourable outcomes. Classroom and on-the-job training programs showed relatively positive impacts in the medium-term, despite often having insignificant or negative short-term effects.

Focused only on European countries, Kluve (2010) found that while direct employment initiatives within the public sector often show negative impacts, wage subsidies and job search assistance tend to be successful in boosting participants' likelihood of employment. Additionally, training programs demonstrated modestly positive effects. Together, these two studies provide insights into which measures or types of programs work more effectively, although neither of these meta-analyses conducted a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of ALMPs across different subgroups, including various racial or ethnic groups.

Measures of effectiveness across sub-groups and programs

A systematic review by Filges, Smedslund, Knudsen, and Jørgensen (2015) indicated that participation in ALMPs can increase the likelihood of finding a job, although the impact varies depending on the methodological approach used to analyze the effect. The evidence suggests a small positive effect of overall participation. This effect, measured by hazard ratios and risk difference, suggests a modest improvement in job prospects post-ALMP participation. However, the overall impact is limited, with approximately one additional unemployed person obtaining a job for every 15 who participate in ALMPs. Additionally, there is insufficient evidence to determine whether ALMPs affect job quality or income. Ultimately, the findings suggest only a modest impact of ALMPs on job finding rates across various programs.

Card, Kluve, and Weber (2018), conducted a meta-analysis on ALMPs, concluding that their overall effects are negligible in the short-term but tend to become more favourable in the medium to long-term, typically two to three-year post-program. They noted considerable divergence in impact depending on the program type, with those focusing on outcomes such as human capital development showing the greatest effectiveness, while those aiding job searches demonstrating less long-term benefits. Moreover, they identified significant variation in program

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[4]   Program impact was measured in different ways across the included studies – thereby using various dependent variables, spanning from the length of time spent in registered unemployment to the average quarterly earnings. To measure program impact, the included studies also utilized distinct econometric modelling approaches. See Card et al. (2010) for more details.

effectiveness by groups of participants, highlighting that women and individuals who have experienced prolonged periods of unemployment tend to derive the most substantial advantages.

We should note that neither Filges et al. (2015) nor Card et al. (2018) conducted comparative assessments of how effective ALMPs are across different racial or ethnic groups. This could stem from insufficient data concerning the racial or ethnic backgrounds of the participants included in the studies. Upon reviewing the studies incorporated into these meta-analyses, socio-demographic information was primarily comprised of gender or age, with limited or no mention of racial or ethnic identities.

Although they admittedly used non-systematic methodologies, other studies have shown rather discouraging results related to the effectiveness of ALMPs. For example, Crépon and van den Berg's (2016) review indicated that ALMPs are generally ineffective in improving job market entry, despite considerable effort. Positive employment outcomes are limited compared to the resources invested, and there is uncertainty about whether these programs are worthwhile expenditures. Moreover, limited understanding exists regarding the impact of ALMPs on various aspects of participants' lives such as health, family, and involvement in the criminal justice system. Crépon and van der Berg (2016) stress the need for randomized controlled trials (RCTs) to better understand the impact of ALMP assignment rules and mechanisms, especially for socially excluded, unemployed youth and individuals lacking information about labour market conditions.

Levy Yeyati, Montané, and Sartorio (2019) conducted the first systematic review of RCTs of ALMPs, which revealed more positive findings: (1) approximately one third of the estimated impact effects were both positive and statistically significant; (2) initiatives tended to produce favourable outcomes when the general economic context was characterized by higher gross domestic product (GDP) growth and lower unemployment rates; (3) programs focused on enhancing human capital, such as vocational training, support for independent workers, and wage subsidies, demonstrated significant positive impacts; and (4) the duration of the program, financial incentives, personalized follow-up, and targeted activities all played crucial roles in determining the effectiveness of these interventions.

More specifically, Levy Yeyati, Montané, and Sartorio (2019) observed that the effects on employment and earnings were moderately positive overall. In comparison to control groups, the median impact on participants' employment outcomes varied, ranging from approximately 11 per cent for wage subsidies and support for independent workers, to two per cent for employment services. Vocational training fell within this spectrum, with a median impact of 6.7 per cent. Regarding earnings outcomes, wage subsidies and support for independent workers showed higher median impacts, with an increase of nearly 17 per cent in reported coefficients. Vocational training also exhibited a notable impact on earnings, with a median relative increase

of 7.7 per cent. Conversely, employment services demonstrated no significant effects on earnings.

Escudero et al. (2019) conducted an international comparative analysis of ALMPs among 31 OECD countries and their effectiveness in activating and integrating low-skilled individuals into the labour market. The author examined the impact of ALMPs on employment outcomes, focusing on factors such as program management, resource allocation, policy continuity, and measures targeted at vulnerable populations.[5] The study found that effective management and implementation of ALMPs, coupled with adequate resource allocation and policy continuity, are crucial for achieving positive outcomes. Initiatives aimed at entrepreneurship support and supporting vulnerable populations are particularly effective in reducing unemployment, especially among low-skilled individuals.

The vital role of health: Impacting the equation of effectiveness

A recent and noteworthy contribution concerning the relationship between ALMPs and employability is presented in a study by Nielsen Arendt, Lindegaard Andersen, and Saaby (2020). Their research investigated the utility of eight employability measures as intermediate outcome indicators for the long-term unemployed. Utilizing a repeated survey linked to administrative data, they employed three-way fixed-effect models for estimation. Results indicated that self-reported health served as a valuable outcome measure for the targeted population of long-term unemployed individuals. Specifically, only this measure predicted subsequent employment and exhibited a positive association with prior participation in active labour market programs compared to non-participation. This assertion is corroborated by earlier research indicating that health and self-efficacy are significant predictors of employment (Van Hooft, 2014; Andersson, 2015), surpassing factors such as social skills and human capital (Koen et al., 2013; McArdle et al., 2007). These findings significantly contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the association between ALMPs participation and employment outcomes.

Gaps in the international literature

One can assume that ALMPs would benefit Black individuals by providing training, job placement assistance, and other support employment and training services to alleviate the multiple barriers Black individuals and communities face related to their labour market outcomes and economic prosperity, especially as Canada moves out of the COVID-19 pandemic (Spencer, Elmi, & Barata, 2022). Yet, as we have seen in this international review of the academic literature, the efficacy of ALMPs in conferring benefits upon participants is contingent upon a myriad of factors, including the nature of the programs themselves and their precise

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5   Vulnerable groups are not clearly defined in Escudero (2018).

targeting towards specific demographic cohorts. In the context of designing programs tailored for Black people in Canada, it is imperative to take into account the aforementioned research findings.

Active labour market policies in Canada – Overview of Labour Market and Workforce Development Agreements

During the economic recession of the 1990s, Canada faced high unemployment rates, prompting a re-evaluation of training and employment policies. In response, the federal government introduced the Human Resources Development Agreement (HRDA) in 1996 (Brisson, 2015). The HRDA aimed to decentralize funding for training and employment services to provincial and territorial governments, allowing for increased flexibility and responsiveness to local needs (Department of Human Resources Development, 1996).

Presently, ESDC oversees these policy decisions and allocates funding to provinces and territories through the Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) and Workforce Development Agreements (WDAs). These agreements are part of the broader framework of federal-provincial/territorial collaboration in Canada, recognizing that labour market dynamics and workforce development needs can vary significantly across Canadian regions. These EI-funded agreements reflect the commitment to creating opportunities for individuals to participate meaningfully in the workforce while considering the diverse challenges that they may encounter.

ALMPs in Canada are intricately linked to Employment Insurance (EI), as they aim to enhance the employability of individuals receiving EI benefits by offering tailored support and resources to help them re-enter the workforce effectively. As such, EI eligibility determines participation for most Canadians under ALMPs. Because EI eligibility is shaped by pre-existing labour force attachment, it is crucial to acknowledge that individuals in precarious employment, who are disproportionately represented in underserved groups, often do not qualify for ALMPs due to their ineligibility for EI. Consequently, despite facing inadequate employment conditions, they are unable to access the essential services they require.

Labour Market Development Agreements

Established under Part II of the 1996 Employment Insurance Act, LMDAs are bilateral agreements between the federal government and each province and territory for the design and delivery of programs and services aimed at assisting EI eligible individuals to prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment. In the fiscal year 2020 to 2021, Canada transferred approximately $2.5 billion for LMDAs to the provinces and territories (see Table 2; ESDC, 2022A).

Table 2   LMDA total expenditures between 2020-2021

Province/Territory	2020 to 2021
British Columbia	$324,175,000
Alberta	$192,380,000
Saskatchewan	$54,371,000
Manitoba	$61,704,000
Ontario	$741,361,740
Quebec	$706,505,000
Newfoundland & Labrador	$150,306,000
Nova Scotia	$101,182,000
New Brunswick	$111,497,000
Prince Edward Island	$29,755,000
Yukon	$4,669,000
Northwest Territories	$4,766,000
Nunavut	$3,954,000
Total	**$2,486,625,740**

Source: ESDC, 2022A.

LMDA programs and services include:

Employment benefits

- **Skills Development** – direct financial assistance to individual Canadians to select, arrange, and pay for training. Training can include adult-based education, literacy and essential skills, language training, short-term training, and occupational training leading to certification from an accredited institution.

- **Targeted Wage Subsidies** – provides subsidies for the wages of individuals whom employers would not ordinarily hire. Subsidies range in duration from 16 to 52 weeks, with the maximum level ranging from 50 per cent to 100 per cent of the employee's wage.

- **Job Creation Partnerships** – support community-oriented projects that provide work experience to participants.

- **Self-Employment** – provides financial assistance and business planning advice to entrepreneurs to help them start their own business.

- **Support measures** – includes Employment Assistance Services, Labour Market Partnerships, and Research and Innovation (ESDC, 2022A).

Support measures

- **Employment Assistance Services** – support individuals as they prepare to enter or re-enter the workforce or assist them to find a better job. Services include job search services, career development and counselling, and résumé writing assistance.

- **Labour Market Partnerships** – enables employers, employee or employer associations, community groups, and communities to work together to develop or implement strategies for labour force adjustments and meet human resources requirements.

- **Research and Innovation Initiatives** –identify better ways of helping people prepare for, return to, or keep employment (ESDC, 2022A).

Workplace Development Agreements (WDAs)

Introduced in 2017, WDAs are bilateral agreements between the federal government and each province and territory that focus on supporting the delivery of employment and training programs and services for Canadians and employers. The WDAs consolidated and replaced the previous Canada Job Fund Agreements, the Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities, and the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers. WDAs complement LMDAs by focusing on reaching people who are further removed from the labour market, such as individuals who are unemployed or underemployed and are not EI eligible.

The WDAs are open-ended agreements, with a total ongoing annual funding envelope of $722 million (see Table 3). The Government of Canada allocated an additional $900 million to the WDAs over the six fiscal years from April 2017 to March 2023. In the 2020 to 2021 fiscal year, another $1.5B was allocated to the WDAs to support economic recovery in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (ESDC, 2022B).

Specifically, WDAs aim to:

- Support Canadians to develop the skills to find, succeed, and advance in their careers;

- Require that a dedicated portion of each province/territory's annual allocation be used for programming for persons with disabilities;

- Provide supports to underrepresented groups, for example, Indigenous peoples, women, youth, older workers, and newcomers to Canada;

- Support employers seeking to train current or future employees;

- Encourage research and innovative projects to test new approaches (ESDC, 2022B).

Table 3   LMDA total expenditures between 2020-2021

Province/Territory	2018 to 2019
British Columbia	$107,447,325
Alberta	$90,783,116
Saskatchewan	$28,366,230
Manitoba	$29,462,080
Ontario	$296,494,169
Quebec	$176,480,928
Newfoundland & Labrador	$13,198,830
Nova Scotia	$23,273,724
New Brunswick	$18,185,042
Prince Edward Island	$3,881,167
Yukon	$3,142,463
Northwest Territories	$3,142,463
Nunavut	$3,142,463
Total	**$797,000,000**

Source: ESDC, 2022B.

LMDAs and WDAs evaluations

When examining ALMPs in Canada, it is important to note that a longstanding tradition of
federal governmental evaluation exists (Fay, 1996; Meager & Evans, 1998). Indeed, in the mid-
1990s, Fay (1996) and Meager and Evans (1998) cited Canada as an example when it comes to
evaluation and the use of rigorous evaluation methods such as RCTs. Since then, most OECD
countries have caught up to this trend, as seen in our international review of the literature.

In the present context and in terms of monitoring and evaluation at the federal government,
LMDAs have taken precedence as the most significant aspect of impact assessment conducted by
ESDC, as highlighted by OECD (2022). Furthermore, the evaluation techniques and dataset
developed for assessing LMDAs have been adopted for analyzing other funding streams such as
Indigenous Skills and Employment Training and the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy. The
availability of evaluation data pertaining to WDAs is limited to a single report from 2022 (ESDC,
2022B) and attributable to their inception in 2017-18, as indicated by the OECD (2022) and in
contrast to the multiple reports accessible for LMDAs.

When examining the most recent LMDA and WDA evaluations (at the provincial and horizontal levels) from 2017 onwards, we identified a few pertinent trends (ESDC, 2017-2023). These trends include:

- **Positive impact on employment**: Both LMDAs and WDAs have shown a positive impact on employment outcomes, with participants experiencing improvements in their employment rates and attachment to the labour market.

- **Effectiveness of programs and services**: Various programs and services offered under LMDAs and WDAs have been found to be effective in enhancing participants' employability and skills development. These programs include Skills Development, Targeted Wage Subsidies, and Job Creation Partnerships.

- **Importance of early intervention**: Early provision of Employment Assistance Services during EI claims has been highlighted as particularly effective in facilitating early return to work and improving employment outcomes.

- **Cost-effectiveness**: The evaluations have shown that the social benefits of participating in LMDA and WDA interventions outweigh the costs, indicating positive returns on investment in terms of societal benefits.

- **Support for vulnerable groups**: There is evidence to suggest that LMDAs and WDAs have been successful in providing support to vulnerable groups, such as youth, older workers, and visible minorities, leading to increased employment rates and reduced disparities in labour market outcomes. However, evidence is mixed for visible minorities related to an increase in their earnings.

Exploring in more detail the evidence of LMDAs and WDAs for visible minority groups, ESDC only started to investigate the outcomes of visible minorities as of 2022, in their WDAs evaluation (ESDC, 2022B). Previous to this, no race-based data was reported. This report found that participants who identified as visible minorities saw a notable rise in their employment rates following participation compared to those who did not identify as part of a visible minority. Additionally, they experienced less of a decrease in their employment rates than white participants following the onset of the pandemic.

The federal government's evaluation of specific provincial LMDAs reported on outcomes for participants who identified as a visible minority in their 2023 reports, but only Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario reported on these outcomes. In British Columbia, individuals who identified as belonging to a visible minority group and who had participated in training services bolstered their connection to the labour market, leading to notable increases in both employment rates (by 13.2 percentage points) and annual earnings (by $6,673; ESDC, 2023A).

The findings from Alberta and Ontario present a somewhat varied picture (ESDC, 2023BC). In Alberta, former claimants[6] who participated in "Foundational Learning Supports/Occupational Training (FLS/OT) – Apprentices" and who identified as visible minorities demonstrated an increased employment rate (+4.2 percentage points). However, they encountered a reduction in their employment earnings immediately after the program (ESDC, 2023B). Similarly, Ontario results show that in comparison to visible minority individuals who did not participate, active claimants who were visible minorities and who engaged in Skills Development increased their employment rates (+3.3 percentage points) and decreased their reliance on EI benefits (by -$300 per year). However, they also faced a decline in earnings in the first year after participation. Additionally, when compared to visible minority participants who solely received Employment Assistance Services (EAS), former claimants in Skills Development experienced a drop in their average earnings (-$2,551 per year; ESDC, 2023C).

As for the horizontal LMDAs evaluation (ESDC, 2022A), it was reported that visible minority individuals who were actively claiming EI benefits and engaged in skills development and targeted wage subsidies programs experienced enhancements in their connections to the labour market. They experienced increased earnings and employment rates alongside decreased dependency on government income supports, particularly those in skills development. Conversely, former participants in skills development did not see comparative advantages.

Aligned with a Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) assessment, selected labour market programs were investigated by ESDC (2023D), and results indicated that individuals from visible minority backgrounds (both female and male) participating in Targeted Wage Subsidies (TWS) experienced the most substantial enhancements in both employment earnings and employment rates compared to other subgroups (analyses done based on recent immigration, age, and gender). Specifically, for the subset of visible minority participants, the TWS program resulted in:

- A yearly average rise in post-participation earnings of $1,663 for female participants and $1,831 for male participants.

- An average yearly increase in employment rates of 5.1 percentage points for female participants and 4.6 percentage points for male participants.

- An average yearly reduction in reliance on income support of 0.2 percentage points for female participants and 1.6 percentage points for male participants (though statistically insignificant).

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6   Former claimants are participants who started an intervention up to three years after the end of their EI benefits. By contrast, active claimants are participants who started an intervention while collecting EI benefits. Active claimants have a more current connection to the labour market, whereas former claimants have been away from it for a period of time (Brisson, 2015).

After conducting an extensive search for evidence specifically focused on Black people in Canada, we found a notable absence of evidence regarding the effectiveness of LMDAs and WDAs in improving labour market outcomes for this group. Moreover, the evidence is also scarce for visible minorities as a broader group, as it pertains only to a few and not all programs funded under the Active Labour Market Programs (ALMPs) streams.

BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO BLACK PEOPLES' PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS PROGRAMS IN CANADA

In summary, understanding how to achieve equitable access to employment opportunities and skills development programs for Black people in Canada remains understudied. Despite the country's multicultural ethos and purported commitment to diversity and inclusion (Henry & Tator, 2010), we know that systemic barriers persist, hindering the full participation and advancement of Black individuals in the workforce (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Ng & Gagnon, 2020; Turcotte, 2020). Understanding these barriers and the factors that facilitate or impede Black peoples' engagement in active employment and skills programs is imperative for devising effective policies and interventions aimed at fostering greater equity and inclusivity.

In this section, we explore the intricate landscape of barriers and facilitators influencing the involvement of Black people in active employment and skills programs. Given the limited evidence specifically pertaining to Black people in Canada, we broaden our discussion in some cases to include racialized people overall. Furthermore, we draw upon relevant contexts within the labour market to supplement our analysis, acknowledging the scarcity of literature on Black peoples' participation in training and employment programs.

We examine existing literature, empirical evidence, quantitative and qualitative insights, to shed light on the intricate dynamics at play, elucidating the underlying factors that influence access, engagement, and outcomes for Black individuals within these programs or in related contexts. Moreover, we explore the intersections of race, socio-economic status, educational attainment, and systemic discrimination, recognizing the complex interplay of structural, institutional, and individual factors that contribute to disparities in participation and outcomes.

Our discussion is delineated into three main topics: (1) the impact of systemic racism and racial discrimination, and how culturally responsive practices can help to address these challenges, (2) access barriers and the use of tailored and flexible approaches to develop accessible programming, and (3) using mentorship approaches to address systems mistrust and mentoring. In elucidating the barriers and facilitators to Black peoples' participation in active employment and skills programs, we hope to contribute to a broader discourse on racial equity, social cohesion, and economic prosperity for Black people in Canada.

Systemic racism, racial discrimination, and culturally responsive programming

Systemic racism

From the era of slavery and the segregationist policies of the past to contemporary manifestations of racism, Black communities have grappled with structural barriers that limit their social mobility and economic advancement (DasGupta, Shandal, Shadd, & Segal, 2020; Maynard, 2017). Recognizing that the systemic barriers related to racism affect all aspects of the lives of Black people in Canada, the following section discusses how broader system issues related to educational opportunity gaps, over-representation in the criminal justice system, and disparities in employment opportunities and advancement are critical for understanding the barriers of access to active employment and skills programs.

The Canadian Race Relations Foundation (n.d.) defines systemic racism[7] as "an interlocking and reciprocal relationship between the individual, institutional and structural levels, which function as a system of racism. These various levels of racism operate together in a lockstep model and function together as a whole system." As part of this whole system of disadvantages, systemic racism may affect Black peoples' access to quality education and educational opportunities, which are essential for acquiring the skills and qualifications necessary for employment in high-demand sectors. Indeed, we know that institutional policies and practices systematically create disadvantages that lead to social conditions and processes that perpetuate inequality of opportunity, commonly known as the opportunity gap (Eizadirad, 2020).

These circumstances have tangible implications and consequences for racialized students and their families, impacting their lives both within and beyond the school environment, as observed by Eizadirad in 2016. Black students encounter numerous hurdles within the educational system, including a higher likelihood of being directed into non-university-track programs, experiencing suspension or expulsion, and dropping out of school (City of Ottawa & City for All Women Initiative, 2016; Collins & Magnan, 2018; George, 2020; James & Turner, 2017; James, 2012). As a result, Black individuals may lack the educational credentials or specialized training needed to compete in the job market, further exacerbating employment disparities. Indeed, the likelihood of young Black males being categorized as not in employment, education, or training (NEET) was nearly double that of other young males, according to Census data described in Turcotte (2020).

Scholars and policymakers increasingly recognize the over-representation and encounters of Black individuals in Canada's criminal justice system as a significant social concern (Owusu-Bempah & Gabbidon, 2020). One of the mechanisms that has been discussed to explain this

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7   Canadian Race Relations Foundations, "Glossary of Terms," available at https://crrf-fcrr.ca/glossary-of-terms/

over-representation relates to early experiences in education. Indeed, the authors of a comprehensive report on the origins of youth violence in Ontario attribute the criminalization of Black youth to anti-Black racism and zero-tolerance policies in schools (McMurtry & Curling, 2008).

A well-documented phenomenon called the school-to-prison pipeline has shown to affect Black students in greater numbers compared to their white counterparts (e.g., Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). This pipeline is described as a process through which students, particularly those from marginalized communities, are pushed out of the educational system and into the criminal justice system (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). This phenomenon is characterized by policies and practices within schools that disproportionately target and penalize racialized students, students with disabilities, and those from low-income backgrounds, resulting in their increased likelihood of involvement with law enforcement and incarceration.

Key elements of the school-to-prison pipeline include (1) zero-tolerance policies, (2) increased police presence in schools, (3) disproportionate disciplinary actions such as suspension, expulsion, and referrals to law enforcement for minor infractions compared to their white peers, and (4) a lack of support services (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). A study in the US found that school discipline, in particular suspension, led to poorer educational outcomes for Black youth and was a "major source of racial achievement gap and educational reproduction of inequality" (Morris & Perry, 2016, p. 82). Overall, the school-to-prison pipeline reflects one example of the many systemic inequalities and structural barriers at work against Black Canadians. Systemic barriers within the educational system have been shown to perpetuate the criminalization of racialized students and hinder their academic success and social mobility, and ultimately, may limit their access to training, educational opportunities, and employment.

Systemic racism has also been alleged to prevent Black people in Canada from employment opportunities and advancement in the labour market. A contemporary example is the Black Class Action lawsuit in Canada – a legal action filed in 2020 by Black people in Canada alleging systemic racism and discrimination within the federal public service, including the RCMP and Correctional Service Canada. The lawsuit is seeking compensation for decades of discrimination, harassment, and unequal treatment experienced by Black employees in the public sector. Damages claimed encompass various grievances such as wrongful denial of promotion, intentional infliction of mental suffering, constructive dismissal, wrongful termination, negligence, and notably, violations of employment law, human rights law, and breaches of the Charter.

This class action aims to address issues such as barriers to advancement, differential treatment, and systemic racism within the public sector institutions (Black Class Action, 2020). Considering our understanding of how systemic racism infiltrates opportunities and advancement in the labour market, it is reasonable to infer that Black people in Canada may face obstacles in

accessing training and employment programs due to systemic inequalities in education,
employment, and social networks. However, it is noteworthy that such issues have not been
thoroughly investigated in either academic research or government-sponsored evaluations.

Intersectionality exacerbates the challenges confronting Black people in Canada related to the
impact systemic racism has on access to employment and training initiatives. For example, Black
women may endure compounded discrimination stemming from both race and gender,
confronting distinct obstacles like caregiving duties and limited access to affordable childcare
when seeking training opportunities. Likewise, Black individuals from low-income backgrounds
or at proximity to the criminal justice system may confront further impediments to accessing
training and employment programs, as well as obtaining stable employment, due to systemic
biases and societal stigmatization (e.g., Decker et al., 2015; Tucker, 2021).
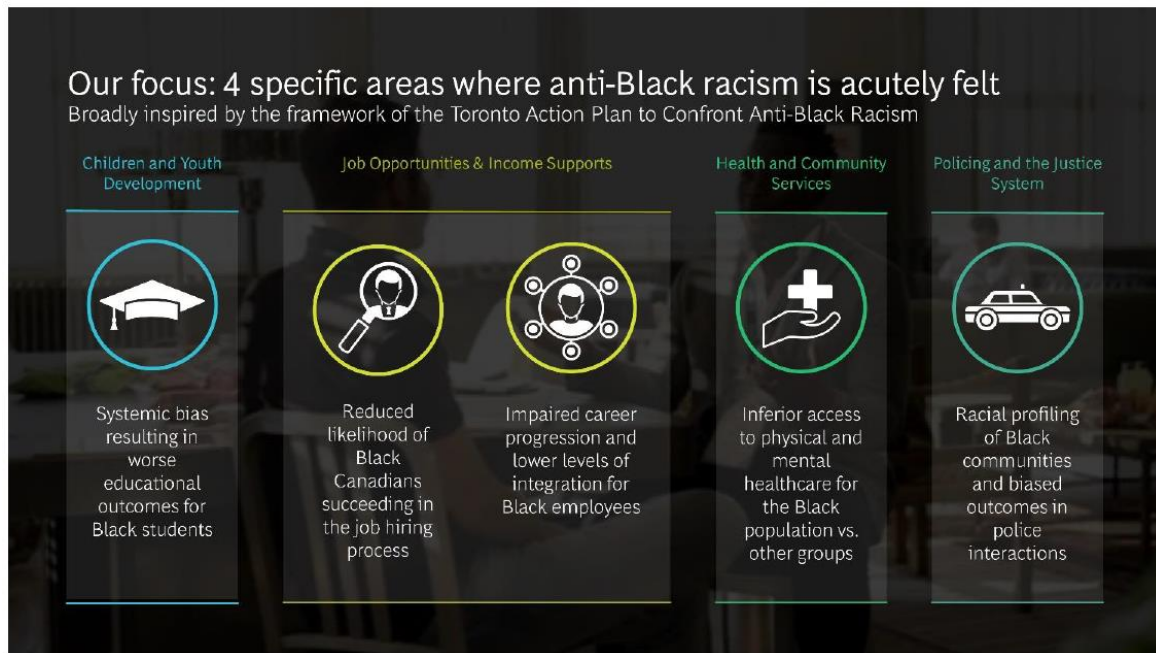
Racial discrimination

The enduring legacy of anti-Black racism in Canada continues to affect Black communities,
hindering numerous individuals from realizing their complete potential (Trudeau, 2024). In
recent years, the term "anti-Black racism" (see definition below) has gained traction in public
discourse and academic scholarship as a framework for analyzing and combating racial injustice
experienced by Black individuals.

> *Anti-Black racism is the racial prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination that is
> directed at people of African descent, rooted in their unique history and
> experience of enslavement. It is manifested in the legacy and racist ideologies that
> continue to define African descendants' identities, their lives and places them at
> the bottom of society and as primary targets of racism. It is manifested in the
> legacy of the current social, economic, and political marginalization of African
> Canadians in society such as the lack of opportunities, lower socio-economic
> status, higher unemployment, significant poverty rates and over-representation
> in the criminal justice system. Anti-Black racism is characterized by particularly
> virulent and pervasive racial stereotypes. Canadian courts and various
> Commissions have repeatedly recognized the pervasiveness of anti-Black
> stereotyping and the fact that African Canadians are the primary targets of
> racism in Canadian society.* (Morgan & Bullen, 2015, p. 7)

This definition acknowledges the specific historical and structural dynamics that contribute to
the marginalization and exclusion of Black individuals and communities. DasGupta et al. (2020)
provides a comprehensive analysis of key areas impacted by anti-Black racism in Canada (see
Figure 10), including discrimination affecting employment, at both the hiring and career
progression levels.

Figure 10   Framework on the areas impacted by anti-Black racism in Canada

Source: DasGupta et al. (2020).

The pervasive issue of employment discrimination and its impact on Black people in Canada is paramount as it serves as a foundational element in addressing systemic inequities. Starting there will help Canadians move to the discussion on racial discrimination within training and employment programs and services, highlighting how these barriers further perpetuate disparities in access and opportunities for Black individuals.

Racial discrimination in hiring practices and workplace cultures continues to present significant barriers to employment for Black people in Canada. Studies have consistently shown that Black job applicants face discrimination in hiring processes, including biases in resume screening and interview selection, which can impede their access to employment opportunities commensurate with their qualifications (e.g., Quillian, Pager, Hexel, & Midtbøen, 2017; Ogbuagu, 2012; Pedulla, 2018). Pedulla (2018) found that white job applicants received more callbacks than Black applicants, even when they had identical resumes. The disparity in callbacks between white and Black applicants was even more pronounced during periods of low unemployment, indicating that racial discrimination in hiring practices persists and may be exacerbated during economic downturns.

These results are corroborated by a meta-analysis of 97 field experiments conducted across nine nations in Europe and North America, which discovered that in each country, non-white

applicants faced notable setbacks in securing callbacks for interviews compared to white counterparts with comparable job-related attributes (Quillian et al., 2019). Interestingly, the study revealed that Canada exhibited a higher rate of discrimination than the United States (Quillian et al., 2019).

Despite the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) upholding the right to equal protection and benefits under the law without any discrimination based on race, employed Black people in Canada still report more instances of unfair treatment or discrimination at their workplace. For example, Black people in Canada were more inclined to report unfair treatment or discrimination within the 12 months preceding the survey, compared to their counterparts in the general population, according to data from the General Social Survey (2016) in Figure 11.

Figure 11   **Experience of unfair treatment or discrimination at work among working population aged 15 years and older in Canada by gender**
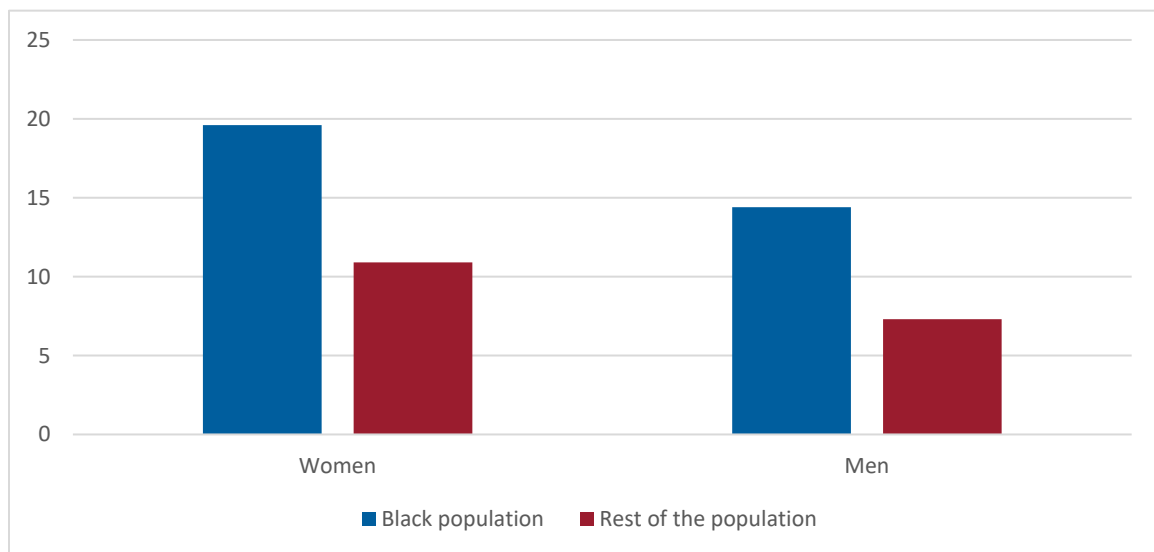
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2016.

These results are even higher in the Black Canadian National Survey (Foster et al., 2023), which showed that 48 per cent of Black males and 45 per cent of Black female respondents reported experiencing unfair treatment by an employer regarding hiring, pay, or promotion within the year preceding the survey.

Discriminatory practices also continue post-hiring, limiting numerous racialized workers from accessing positions, duties, and opportunities for promotion and career advancement (Collins, 1997). Indeed, when racialized Canadians find employment, they face what Block and Galabuzi (2011) call a "persistent colour code that blocks them from the best-paying jobs" (p. 3).

Workplace discrimination and microaggressions undermine Black peoples' ability to thrive and advance in their careers, contributing to underrepresentation in leadership positions and wage disparities (DasGupta et al., 2020). These experiences have led a reported 33 to 50 per cent of Black, East Asian, and South Asian professionals in Canada feeling 'on guard' to protect themselves against bias (Thorpe-Moscon, Pollack, & Olu-Lafe, 2019). This phenomenon has been described as an emotional tax and has been linked to employee retention. For example, 50 to 69 per cent of Black, East Asian, and South Asian professionals who were highly on guard against bias also have a high intent to quit their positions (Thorpe-Moscon, Pollack, & Olu-Lafe, 2019).

Hasford (2016) also investigated the workplace experiences of young Black people in Canada, revealing the influence of dominant cultural narratives and racism on their professional environments. This study elucidated the challenges they encounter, such as discriminatory practices in hiring and promotions. Furthermore, it discussed various strategies of resistance employed by these individuals, including forming support networks, advocating for policy changes within organizations, and challenging discriminatory behaviours directly through assertive communication or legal means. Based on the literature reviewed, it is evident that Black workers have had to exhibit considerable resilience and resistance by employing a range of strategies to confront and counteract racism and discrimination in their workplaces (e.g., Hasford, 2016; Thorpe-Moscon, Pollack, & Olu-Lafe, 2019).

When it comes to experiences related to racial discrimination in programs providing employment support and training, very limited literature was found. Anisef and Kilbride (2008) highlighted how employment programs may unintentionally categorize youth participants as "at-risk," thereby diminishing their appeal to potential employers. Programs that promote entrepreneurial ventures, which may fall under self-employment measures under the LMDAs, were seen as offering a different route to securing employment for Black youth. Indeed, many of the Somali youth who participated in the study conducted by van de Sande et al. (2019) showed interest in understanding the process of initiating their own business. While not explicitly mentioned by the participants, the authors stated that the inclination towards entrepreneurial programs might stem from a sense of pessimism about finding fulfilling employment in the existing job market. While entrepreneurship provides a pathway for Black people to navigate, prosper, and confront oppressive structures, it persists as a complex domain where power dynamics are constantly negotiated according to Knight (2008).

Finally, we are also aware that the pandemic exacerbated disparities concerning employment. Indeed, the *Widening Inequality: Effects on the pandemic on jobs and income* report (Environics Institute, Future Skills Center & Diversity Institute, 2021) showed that Black workers were particularly affected by the pandemic, with 52 per cent reporting either a job loss or work hours or both, based on results from the Survey on Employment and Skills. Although not directly related to personal encounters in the workplace, 23 per cent of Black Canadians indicated that

they have faced discrimination since the start of the pandemic, based on results from the Black
Canadian National Survey (Foster et al., 2023).

Culturally responsive practices

Given the context of systemic racism and racial discrimination faced by Black people in Canada,
it is crucial to engage in culturally responsive practices to meet their unique needs and provide a
framework for meaningful participation and engagement. As systemic racism and discrimination
are a critical obstacle to Black peoples' pursuit of a meaningful career, employment and training
programs must actively address these challenges as well. One of the ways to address these
important issues of systemic racism and racial discrimination has been culturally responsive
practices aimed at fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment for Black people in Canada
(Anisef & Kilbride, 2008; Cukier et al., 2023; Hasford, 2016). Indeed, culturally responsive
practices provide a framework for understanding and addressing systemic racism and racial
discrimination by centering the experiences and voices of marginalized communities, promoting
equity and inclusion, fostering cultural competence, empowering individuals and communities,
and driving systemic change. These practices include:

- Ensuring that organizations offering employment support have leadership teams reflecting
  Black communities;

- Establishing programs led by professionals that are representative of the communities they
  serve (e.g., program staff and management sharing racial, ethnic, or cultural background of
  the participants);

- Tailoring programs to reflect the cultural backgrounds, values, and experiences of Black
  people in Canada (e.g., culturally appropriate foods and beverages during program events or
  gatherings, celebrations of significant cultural events and holidays such as Black History
  Month, including elements of Black art, music and literature, etc.);

- Consulting meaningfully and involving Black communities in training and employment
  program design, program practices and policies, and evaluation;

- Implementing anti-racist policies including clear procedures for reporting and addressing
  instances of racism and discrimination;

- Training program staff on cultural safety, including training on unconscious bias to increase
  awareness of racial and ethnic diversity and mitigate the impact of implicit biases in
  decision-making processes; and

- Actively combating discrimination within program structures including reporting
  mechanisms, accountability procedures when racism and discrimination happens, and
  support and resources for individuals who have experienced racism and discrimination.

Access barriers and accessible programming

Black people in Canada encounter various barriers that hinder their access to active employment and skills programs (e.g., Briggs, 2017, 2019, 2021; Cukier et al., 2023; van de Sande et al., 2019). It is noteworthy that much of the literature on these barriers emerges from qualitative studies involving Black youth born in Canada, and first- and second-generation immigrant Black youth. We found very little evidence related to Black adults' barriers of access to employment and training programs. Based on the literature reviewed, we will explore access barriers faced by Black people in Canada such as limited awareness of and information about available programs and opportunities, economic disparities and financial challenges, language barriers, and insufficient communication hindering their access to employment and training programs.

Access barriers

Limited awareness of and information about available programs, EI-eligibility criteria, and application processes can hinder Black peoples' access to active employment and skills programs (Cukier et al., 2023). In van de Sande et al.'s (2019) study using focus group discussions, Somali youth in Ottawa emphasized the need for more information about available education and training programs to enable informed decision-making and choices regarding pathways towards achieving a fulfilling career. Numerous studies have emphasized the insufficient assistance racialized young individuals receive from their school counsellors (Anisef & Kilbride, 2008; City of Ottawa & City for All Women Initiative, 2016), showing that this lack of accessible information starts early. While many participants in van de Sande et al.'s (2019) study did access job placement and training programs – such as help with resume writing and the opportunity for summer employment – many expressed a desire for more job placement opportunities tailored to their desired career paths.

These findings underscore the significance of intervening early and offering education and job opportunity information during secondary education to aid youth in transitioning to post-secondary education and creating platforms for them to express their concerns. Moreover, facilitating co-op, practicum, or internships for youth can help them establish social connections and acquire skills essential for academic success and employment readiness, as noted by Anisef and Kilbride (2008) and Greater Toronto Civic Action Alliance (2014).

Most participants in van de Sande et al.'s (2019) study found that employment programs were disjointed, making it challenging to understand the full spectrum of available services in Ottawa. Young individuals expressed frustration over centres failing to share information with service users about each others' services. Additionally, participants in this study highlighted that they were not being promptly informed about the opportunities available to them. A proposed strategy to mitigate these obstacles involved establishing a centralized location where youth can access information regarding employment opportunities and gain insights into the job market, as

recommended by Greater Toronto Civic Action Alliance (2014) and Anisef and Kilbride (2008).
Underscoring the need for culturally responsive practices, van de Sande et al. (2019) shared that
all Black youth in their research expressed the desire for staff members to possess knowledge
about their cultural background and awareness of the specific challenges and experiences that
contemporary Somali youth encounter.

Finally, the lack of accessible information may stem from a digital divide and limited proficiency
in digital skills, such as the ability to access internet, effectively search for, and locate
information online that affects racialized communities more prominently (Andrey, Masoodi,
Malli, & Dorkenoo, 2021; Cukier et al., 2023). While online services show potential, young people
with restricted internet access or limited availability of computers and digital tools may
encounter difficulties in accessing services and resources when they are hosted online. Access to
reliable internet connection and up-to-date information and communication technologies is
essential for fair and comprehensive participation in education and employment (Andrey et al.,
2021). Racialized individuals, newcomers, and households with low income may face challenges
in accessing fundamental information and communication technologies. Employment and
training programs aimed at enhancing employment prospects for racialized youth should be
coupled with strategies to address this digital gap.

While not explicitly highlighted in the literature review, it is important to recognize additional
barriers that may stem from systemic challenges faced by Black people in Canada, such as
economic and class disparities, financial constraints, language barriers and credential
recognition (particularly true for newcomer individuals whose primary language is neither
English nor French), and insufficient communication channels for Black people in Canada. These
barriers may further impede Black peoples' participation in programs that entail fees,
transportation, access to childcare, as well as in accessing and comprehending program details
(Environics Institute, Future Skills Centre & Diversity Institute, 2023).

Accessible programming

Offering accessible programming tailored to the needs of Black people in Canada is crucial for
reducing barriers to access (Future Skills Council, 2020). By centering the specific needs and
experiences of Black individuals in Canada, accessible programming can address intersectional
challenges and systemic barriers that disproportionately affect Black communities, thereby
promoting greater equity and inclusion in training and employment programming. In Gariba
(2009), Ghanaian and Somali youth in the Greater Toronto Area advocated for close
collaboration between community leaders and Black youth in designing programs and initiatives.
They also suggested establishing community centres customized to their identity and needs,
along with forging connections with other organizations to facilitate networking with employers
and improve labour market access.

As highlighted in Cukier et al. (2023) and Future Skills Council (2020), accessible programs include wrap-around supports such as financial assistance, transportation subsidies, childcare services, technology access, and other measures to alleviate barriers and ensure equitable program access. Grant and Cooper (2023) revealed insights from 50 years of subsidized employment programs in the United States, emphasizing the importance of wrap-around supports, including healthcare coverage, childcare, legal aid, financial guidance, and case supervision, in mitigating non-work-related obstacles for marginalized workers. This comprehensive assistance enables consistent engagement with job and training opportunities provided by subsidized employment programs.

While there is limited evidence specifically on accessible programming for Black people in Canada, it is reasonable to assume that programs valuing Black people as active participants in program design, implementation, and evaluation processes could foster awareness, ownership, accountability, and sustainable outcomes for Black participants in employment and training programs.

Promising practices

A report by Pakula and Smith Fowler (2021) explored promising programming practices to promote access and meaningful participation for equity-seeking groups (including women, youth, Indigenous persons, newcomers, racialized groups, people who identify as LGBTQ2S+, and persons with disabilities). Albeit not focused on Black people in Canada specifically, the research synthesis report offered valuable insights into these promising program practices that are aligned with accessible programming, as seen below.

Promising program practices

- **Recognizing that people may need many different types of supports** regardless of their identity or group membership (e.g., wrap-around supports, one-to-one customization).

- **Providing opportunities to try things out,** and doing so in a safe space, without fear of getting kicked out of the program. For example, trying and "failing forward" was noted as a key part of successful youth programs.

- **Offering programming that is strengths-based, experiential, and culturally relevant**.

- **Extending options for supports and follow-up** after the program is completed.

- **Redefining and broadening definitions of success**, including offering programming options to work with a person whatever success means, and incorporating markers of success as defined by the participants.

- **Building in opportunities within programming to shift the power balance.** Giving participants choices and options of organizations, programs, or courses they engage with (e.g., via learning and training accounts).

- **Building outreach strategies and taking time to engage with employers**, including building confidence and capacity in the workplaces where programs are sending applicants (e.g., cultural competence).

- **Investing in tools and instruments able to capture assets** (rather than deficits). This includes **taking a community building approach** including by focusing on **solutions that come from within the community**, and that recognize and recognize community strengths.

- **Establishing clear procedures for referrals** when a program cannot meet the client's needs, including through building program capacity to understand the landscape of resources and supports.

- **Building extensive flexibilities within programing** in the way participants enter, interact with, and exit programs (e.g., asynchronous and synchronous programming; low barriers to access).

- **Providing program staff with training** on language and issues relevant to equity-seeking groups, including intersectionality, anti-oppression and trauma and violence-informed approaches, cultural competence, etc.

- **Taking the time** to understand the emerging needs people are not willing to disclose right away, including taking the time to determine how to tailor services to individuals, based on their multiple identities, contexts, experiences, and life stage.

- **Providing opportunities for people to know themselves** in terms of their identities, recognizing people may not always be comfortable sharing. Providing opportunities to become mentors is a key strategy for building confidence and a self-esteem in this process.

Systems mistrust and mentoring

Given the detrimental effects of systemic racism and racial discrimination, the experiences of Black people in Canada may lead to mistrust of government agencies, educational institutions, and employers, and diminish their willingness to participate in active employment and skills programs (Cukier et al., 2023; Gariba, 2009). In response, Gariba (2009) suggested that recent Black immigrant youth, particularly those from Ghanaian and Somali communities in Toronto,

often rely on their communities for employment guidance. However, integration into broader networks beyond their communities is essential for success in the labour market. To support this integration, Gariba proposed to enhance existing bridging networks and develop new ones within these communities. They further recommended that publicly funded organizations should actively involve youth in planning services, provide them with skills training to be involved in program evaluation in order for data analysis to improve program outcomes, implement fair employment criteria, coordinate job search assistance and gender-specific skills programs, educate employers on hiring practices, and facilitate workplace integration through mentoring programs. Indeed, mentoring Black people by Black people plays a crucial role in addressing systemic mistrust by offering culturally relevant support, validation, empowerment, guidance, and community building. These mentoring relationships not only empower individual mentees but also contribute to broader efforts to challenge and transform systemic injustices and promote greater equity and inclusion for Black communities.

Despite the limited evidence regarding factors that facilitate Black peoples' participation in employment and training programs in Canada, there is, indeed, a consensus in the literature that mentoring plays a crucial role and should be considered a key element of programming (Basra, 2021; Briggs, 2019; Brown, 2021; Edem, 2023; Gariba, 2009; Ogbuagu, 2012). The benefits of mentoring for Black youth were showcased with data from Mentor Canada (Church-Duplessis, 2022), noting that 92 per cent of mentored Black youth consistently reported being employed or studying, compared to 83 per cent of un-mentored Black youth.

These results are aligned with recommendations from Briggs (2017), that educators and mentors could significantly support second-generation Caribbean Black male youth by implementing effective strategies to enhance their educational attainment and facilitate their access to stable employment opportunities. A mentorship program grounded in critical race theory could be instrumental in achieving this goal, linking these youth to supports in high schools, community organizations, and post-secondary education job training programs aimed at preparing them for the workforce. This type of mentorship initiative would provide personalized support and guidance through men's groups, addressing daily experiences of racism while equipping participants with the necessary tools and networks for success in the job market (e.g., Briggs, 2017).

Although not falling under the LMDAs structure per se, Edem's (2023) dissertation explored the realities of Nigerian women economic migrants in the Ontario labour market. In this study, interviews with civil society organizations (CSOs) employees revealed that mentoring is a key tool utilized extensively to help newcomer immigrant women overcome systemic barriers. CSO interviewees emphasize mentoring as an empowerment mechanism that enhances labour market progression by expanding networks, refining job search skills, fostering confidence, and equipping women with culturally relevant skills. Additionally, CSOs assist with job searches as part of the mentoring process.

Beyond these important considerations, collaborating with Black community organizations, leaders, and stakeholders can improve outreach, trust, and participation rates among Black people in Canada, and many have also mentioned the importance of including the voices of employers in these collaborations (Cukier et al., 2023). For example, Bredgaard (2018) delved into the critical aspect of employers' perspectives and commitment concerning active labour market policies (ALMPs). Through his typologies and evidence, Bredgaard highlights the nuanced relationship between employers and ALMPs, shedding light on the various factors influencing their engagement. Understanding employers' viewpoints and levels of commitment is crucial for the effective design and implementation of ALMPs, as it provides insights into the challenges and opportunities in fostering collaboration between stakeholders (Orton & Green, 2019). By addressing the different barriers and implementing facilitators, active employment and skills programs can better support the participation and success of Black people in Canada, contributing to greater equity and inclusivity in the labour market.

CURRENT ACTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS PROGRAMS THAT TARGET BLACK PEOPLE IN CANADA

The following section provides an overview of existing services programs related to active employment and skills development specifically targeting Black people in Canada.

Existing services and programs in Canada

There are a variety of services and programs available at the federal, provincial, and community levels that focus on active employment and skills development for Black people in Canada. Some examples at each of these levels are outlined below. Although there is information available that describes these initiatives, there is little research evidence on what aspects of these programs are working well and why.

Federal government

Organizations that target Black people in Canada can access federal funds and programs to support the skills and employment of Black people through the following:

- **Black Entrepreneurship Program (BEP)** – A partnership between the Government of Canada, Black-led business organizations, and financial institutions. With an investment of up to $265 million over four years, it aims to help Black Canadian business owners and entrepreneurs grow their businesses. It includes:

o **Black Entrepreneurship Loan Fund** – Provides loans up to $250,000 to Black business owners and entrepreneurs across the country.

o **National Ecosystem Fund** – Supports not-for-profit Black-led business organizations across the country in their capacity to provide support, mentorship, financial planning, and business training for Black entrepreneurs.

o **Black Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub** – Conducts research on Black entrepreneurship in Canada. It identifies barriers to success and opportunities for growth.

- **Black-led Philanthropic Endowment Fund** – Aims to create a sustainable source of funding for Black-led, Black-focused, and Black-serving non-profit organizations and registered charities.

- **Future Skills Centre's (FSC) Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity's Strength in Structure project** – This project recognizes that Afro-Canadian youth have poorer educational and employment outcomes than their white counterparts due to discrimination in the form of anti-Black racism. It engaged Black youth and Black-focused, Black-led, and Black-serving community organizations to develop a toolkit intended to improve delivery of services to meet the needs of Black youth job seekers.

- **Supporting Black Canadian Communities Initiative (SBCCI)** is a federal grants and contributions initiative that was created in 2019 to:

  o Celebrate and share knowledge about the contributions of people of African descent in Canada.
  o Build capacity in vibrant Black communities across Canada.
  o Reflect Black voices in policies and programs that affect their lives.
  o Remove barriers related to anti-Black racism and other systemic inequities.

The SBCCI provides funding to Black-led and Black-serving organizations. The SBCCI has partnered with the following organizations that distribute program funding:

  o Tropicana Community Services (Toronto)
  o Black Business Initiative (Halifax)
  o Groupe 3737 (Montreal)
  o Africa Centre (Edmonton)

- **Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS)** – Funds programs that help Canadian
  youth (15-30) develop the skills and experience required to successfully transition into the
  labour market. The government is investing over $4.78 million through the YESS program to
  help Black youth gain much needed employment experience.

Provincial government

Some provinces provide services, funding, and programs that seek to aid Black people in Canada
in active employment and skills development programs. Some notable examples of provincially
funded programs include:

Nova Scotia:

- **The Diversity and Inclusion Program** – This initiative works with African Nova Scotians
  and persons of African descent to open doors and create meaningful employment
  opportunities. Fifteen Nova Scotians of African descent were hired in full-time permanent
  positions at the Nova Scotia Works Employment Centres at various locations across the
  province.

Ontario:

- **The Black Youth Action Plan (BYAP)** – The Ontario government is investing an additional
  $14 million in BYAP to help Black youth access employment opportunities and career-
  building resources. The economic empowerment program has three new initiatives that will
  aid community organizations and Black-led employers and business leaders:

  - o **The Career Launch initiative** will support locally developed programs that help
    Black youth access professional networks and skills development in high
    opportunity employment fields.

  - o **The Career Advance initiative** will connect Black youth and young
    professionals with training and work placement opportunities in high
    opportunity industries.

  - o **The Sector-Innovation Networks** will support Black business leaders in high-
    growth sectors of the economy.

Non-governmental organizations active employment measures and skills programs for Black Canadians

In addition to the federal and provincial governmental organizations and programs, there are a number of non-governmental organizations that offer services that are specifically directed to Black Canadians that include the following:

- **Developing Young Leaders of Tomorrow, Today (DYLOTT)** – Delivers a variety of youth programs to ensure young Black leaders have the tools to excel in the current and emerging Canadian and International job market. The programs are designed to address barriers to social inclusion in employment, education, and the broader social context. Supports and services include mentoring and mentorship opportunities, intensive training and skill development, and innovative sector-specific knowledge.

- **Rise in STEM** – Dedicated to fostering a support network of community leaders, students, and professionals to increase access to role models, shatter stereotypes, and demonstrate that any career aspiration is possible. The mission is to level the playing field for Black youth by breaking down barriers to higher education and STEM career pathways. Provides resources and opportunities to enhance well-being, leadership, and technical skills.

- **Lifelong Leadership Institute** – Is an educational organization that provides innovative leadership development to Canadian youth of Jamaican, African-Caribbean and Black heritage, so that they may fulfill their personal and professional ambitions, provide inspiring leadership to their communities and country, and make this world a better place for all.

- **Africa Centre** – Through their program "Boost Pathways to Success", Afro-Canadian youth will be provided with opportunities to learn through mentorship and taking part in pre-employment skills training that includes developing interview skills, how to conduct job searches, and effective resume writing.

- **Afro Caribbean Business Network** – Principal aim is to unify and educate entrepreneurs of African and Caribbean heritage to build scalable businesses.

- **Black Business Initiative (BBI)** – Founded in 1996 by the Federal Government of Canada and the Province of Nova Scotia in an effort to address the distinctive needs of Nova Scotia's Black business community (see profile below).

- **Black Community Employment & Empowerment Services** – Was founded out of the need to help integrate newcomers into Canadian society by bridging the gap between employers and job seekers.

- **BlackNorth Initiative** – Launched a one-stop-shop platform designed to provide access to internships and job postings for career recruitment as well as mentorships, scholarships, and bursaries for post-secondary education.

- **Canadian Black Scientists Network** – A national coalition of Black people possessing or pursuing higher degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine/Health (STEMM), together with Allies who are senior leaders with a demonstrated commitment to action for Black inclusion.

- **CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals** – Based in Scarborough, Ontario CEE was created as a result of the increased gun violence in the Jane and Finch area. CEE provides a variety of programs that aim to improve the careers, education, and empowerment of young Black professionals.

- **DIGITAL: Introducing Black Canadians to Tech Skills & Jobs** – Seeking to elevate the representation of Black Canadians and new immigrants in essential tech roles. This program will tackle the shortage of diverse talent in high-growth fields of artificial intelligence (AI), financial technology, workplace technologies, cybersecurity, and healthcare technology.

- **Federation of Black Canadians (FBC)**: The FBC is a national organization that represents the interests of Black Canadians and works towards creating a more equitable and inclusive society. Though 1.3 million in funding from FedDev Canada Southern Ontario, it is supporting over 170 young Black entrepreneurs in multiple regions across Canada with access to the tools and resources they need to succeed and thrive in their respective industries.

- **Future Black Female** – Created in 2019, Future Black Female (FBF) is a non-for-profit organization that seeks to empower Black girls and women between the ages of 16-22 to take charge of their education and career paths as well as their social, political, and civic engagement (see profile below).

- **Neighbourhood Developing Careers (NDC Trades)** – Is a non-governmental organization that provides information to Black, racialized, and underrepresented youth and their parents and/or guardians about careers in the skilled construction trades.

- **Skills for Change's Black Community Access & Programming**: Supported by the government of Ontario and York University, this organization provides programs that focus on entrepreneurship, STEM, mentorship, technological literacy, leadership skills, data analytics and leadership training for Black women.

Interviews were conducted with representatives three community-based organizations. Please see below for a summary of the key points of these discussions.

Profile #1: Future Black Female

The following is a summary of an interview with a representative from the Future Black Female.

Based in St. Catharines Ontario, Future Black Female (FBF) is a non-profit organization that works to empower Black girls and women between the ages of 16 and 22 to take charge of their education and career paths as well as their social, political, and civic engagement. Services are provided both locally in the Niagara region of Ontario, as well as across Canada. FBF's approach is guided by three principles: female empowerment, social justice, and working closely with community.

FBF provides a number of employment programs and services including:

- **Campus Drop-in Sessions** – Provides an opportunity for high school and university students to speak to a counsellor about what they intend to do when they graduate to cultivate their skills and flourish.

- **Entrepreneurship Accelerator Program** – Supports Black female youth entrepreneurs aged 18 to 25 to start a business in the beauty parlour industry. Provides the retail space and business insurance free of charge, learn skills in entrepreneurship, and meet and work with other like-minded entrepreneurs.

- **Volunteering and employment opportunities** – Provides volunteer opportunities, summer jobs, and coops for Black women and girls related to FBF's work.

Barriers and facilitators to participation in Employment and Skills Programs

The most significant barrier facing Black women and girls is awareness of programs and services. Primary facilitator is partnering with community-based organizations that have a direct connection with Black women. In particular, FBF has had great success working with local schools and school boards. Another strategy that has been effective is showcasing success stories.

Personal circumstances can also prevent Black women from participating in programs and services, including those related to children and childcare. FBF addresses this issue by ensuring that programs and human resource practices are accommodating to the schedules of mothers. This can be particularly challenging for immigrants, as some immigrant women in their home country were responsible for most of the child nurturing. It can be a difficult transition in Canada where they are often required to work outside of the household.

Another barrier is related to newcomers transitioning to becoming a permanent resident or Canadian citizen. Immigrants who are waiting for status, for example once they have graduated from school, can experience gaps in terms of if and how they can work.

Systemic racism is the greatest challenge facing Black women related to finding meaningful employment. FPF often hears from Black women that there is a negative perception of Black Women among employers, such that having their names on their resume can prevent them from obtaining an interview. There is also little representation of both women and Black professionals at the leadership level.

Profile #2: Black Business Initiative

The following is a summary of an interview with a representative from the Black Business Initiative.

The Black Business Initiative (BBI) was founded in 1996 by the Government of Canada and the Province of Nova Scotia to address the unique needs confronting Nova Scotia's Black business community. BBI now provides services to all of Atlantic Canada, supporting Black entrepreneurs from start-ups and development to growth and expansion.

BBI provides a number of services including:

- **Business support** – Business development support to clients who are at various levels of growth, including ideation stage and start-up, to mature companies with many years of experience.

- **Entrepreneurial development and business skills training** – Training support to businesses including access to resources, mentorship, skills training, funding access, procurement, supply chain, communication, marketing, and promotion.

- **Access to resources and capital** – Works with businesses to access resources and capital.

- **B2B Magazine** – BBI's official quarterly periodical provides updates on business development activities, celebrates successes in the business community, and includes helpful resources.

- **SBCCI** – BBI is one of four organizations that distribute funding through SBCCI. BBI has managed two calls for proposals involving 669 projects, 254 organizations, and $16.9 million in funding. A third call was launched in November 2023, but is not yet finalized.

Barriers and facilitators to participation in Employment and Skills Programs

It has always been a challenge reaching Black communities and Black-owned businesses. BBI's approach has focused on extensive engagement in the community, including hiring Black staff who are engaged with, and understand the needs and challenges of Black communities. Outreach and engagement by mainstream business networks are limited and not tailored to the needs of Black communities, which significantly hinders access. This is exacerbated for Black communities that are in remote areas. It is thus critical that support to the Black community is provided through local, Black-led social service organizations. Most challenges in Black communities are better understood and addressed by Black-led grass-roots organizations.

Racism and discrimination have a long history in Canada. There is a lack of representation of Black people in Canada in leadership roles and decision-making positions, which has resulted in limited opportunities for advancement and mentorship. Diversity and inclusion initiatives are therefore important, such as policies and practices that promote equal opportunities and an inclusive work environment. Anti-racism initiatives, including awareness training, can help counter systemic bias and discrimination in the workforce. Mentorship and networking help to facilitate career development and advancement.

Lack of access to quality education and training creates skills gaps, which reduces employment prospects. Investing in accessible and culturally relevant training can bridge skill gaps and improve employment outcomes. Further, economic disparity limits access to financial resources, investment opportunities, and job creation. There needs to be a focus on economic empowerment – supporting Black owned business, creating pathways to entrepreneurship, and job creation within the Black Canadian community.

Profile #3: BlackNorth Initiative

The following is a summary of an interview with a representative from the BNI.

Founded in 2020 by Canadian entrepreneur and philanthropist Wes Hall, the BlackNorth Initiative (BlackNorth) is a Black-serving non-profit organization taking a business-first mindset to ending anti-Black systemic racism and removing barriers that are negatively impacting Black Canadians. As a first step, BlackNorth CEO Pledge has been signed by 500 corporations, public entities, and charitable institutions, with business leaders committing to fostering diversity and equity within their workplaces, particularly by empowering Black employees.

BlackNorth provides a number of employment and skills programs including:

- **BlackNorth Academy** – Provides Black professionals with skills that enhance their business judgment, career prospects, and prepare them to be business leaders.

- **BlackNorth Connect Program** – Provides access to internships and job postings for career recruitment as well as mentorships, scholarships, and bursaries for post-secondary education.

- **B.E.G.I.N**. – A free 'one-stop-shop' directory of resources and tools Black entrepreneurs can use to build their businesses.

- **Work-Live Opportunity** – Offers Black-identifying artists and artist groups three work-live studios in the Regent Park neighbourhood of Toronto.

- **Scholarships & Bursaries** – A listing of scholarships and bursaries available for the Black community.

Barriers and facilitators to participation in Employment and Skills Programs

The primary challenge to Black people's participation in programs and services is knowledge and awareness of available resources. Not all Canadians have equal access to technology, supportive networks, and other mechanisms for learning about resources. BlackNorth addresses this challenge by working closely with community-based organizations that seek out and develop relationships with Black people in their community. Community organizations have intimate knowledge of their community and know how best to target and ensure equitable access to programs and services.

BlackNorth's overall approach is to provide a bridge between corporate Canada and community organizations that service Black people. This allows community organizations to network with corporate Canada and highlight their initiatives and success. Volunteers in corporate Canada are also able to be ambassadors of BlackNorth's programs to create awareness.

A primary gap in services is mentorship for Black professionals. There is a lack of representation of Black people in leadership positions, and therefore, less opportunity for Black professionals for mentorship by a professional who shares the same racial or ethnic background. There is also a strong need for funding related to skills development and certification. This is a challenge as businesses are not always willing to fund training.

Finally, Black professionals face challenges in getting their resumes noticed. Black professionals experience racism and discrimination, often noting that having a visible Black name limits their opportunities. BlackNorth addresses this challenge through the BlackNorth Connect Program – by listing job opportunities from businesses that have committed to diversifying their hiring practices.

The following are a few of the key themes identified from the above three interviews:

- All three organizations emphasized the importance of partnering and working closely with local organizations that have a direct connection with Black people in their communities. This not only ensures that programs will be designed to address the unique needs of the community, but also that community members are aware of the resources and supports available to them.

- Black people in Canada do not have equal access to technology, supportive networks, and other mechanisms for learning about resources. Community organizations have intimate knowledge of their community and know how best to target and ensure equitable access to programs and services.

- Due to systemic racism, there exists in Canada a negative perception of Black people among some employers. Diversity and inclusion initiatives can help to address these perceptions. This includes, for example, policies and practices that promote equal opportunities and an inclusive work environment, as well as awareness training that can help counter systemic bias and discrimination in the workforce.

- There is a lack of representation of Black people in Canada in leadership roles and decision-making positions. This results in fewer opportunities for Black professionals for mentorship by a professional who shares the same racial or ethnic background. Programs that foster mentorship and networking can help to facilitate career development and advancement.

- There needs to be a focus on economic empowerment, as economic disparity limits access to financial resources, investment opportunities, and job creation. This can include supporting Black-owned businesses, creating pathways to entrepreneurship, job creation within the Black Canadian community, and investing in accessible and culturally relevant training.

- Personal circumstances can prevent Black people in Canada from participating in programs and services, for example, related to children and childcare. It is therefore critical that programs and human resource practices are accommodating to the personal circumstances of participants.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

This study examined the socio-demographic, skills, and employment profile of Black people in Canada, emphasizing the unique challenges they face within the labour market. We have identified significant barriers that Black people in Canada encounter when attempting to access active measures programming, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address systemic inequities. Drawing from Canadian and international best practices, we have gleaned valuable insights into strategies for enhancing the participation of Black people in Canada in active measures programming. To provide more equitable and inclusive opportunities, we propose several considerations in Table 4, including the implementation of culturally responsive practices, the provision accessible training and skill development programs, and the establishment of mentorship and support networks. In essence, these recommendations point to the need for initiatives to be led by Black communities for active measures programming to truly respond to the needs of Black communities.

Table 4   Summary of considerations and key practices based on literature review

Recommendations	Key practices
Culturally responsive programming	▪ Be mindful of the diversity within Black communities.
	▪ Ensure that organizations offering employment support have leadership teams reflecting Black communities.
	▪ Establish programs led by professionals that are representative of the communities they serve (e.g., program staff and management sharing racial, ethnic, or cultural background of the participants).
	▪ Tailor programs to reflect the cultural backgrounds, values, and experiences of Black people in Canada (e.g., culturally appropriate foods and beverages during program events or gatherings, celebrations of significant cultural events and holidays such as Black History Month, including elements of Black art, music, and literature, etc.).
	▪ Consult meaningfully and involve Black communities in training and employment program design, program practices and policies, and evaluation.
	▪ Implement anti-racist policies including clear procedures for reporting and addressing instances of racism and discrimination.
	▪ Train program staff on cultural safety, including training on unconscious bias to increase awareness of racial and ethnic diversity and mitigate the impact of implicit biases in decision-making processes.

Recommendations	Key practices
	▪ Actively combat discrimination within program structures including reporting mechanisms, accountability procedures when racism and discrimination happen, and support and resources for individuals who have experienced racism and discrimination. ▪ Stay mindful of the burden carried by Black communities and acknowledge their efforts and the time invested in co-development (e.g., through paid positions, wages, honorariums, etc.).
Accessible programs	▪ Raise awareness about the existence and importance of employment and training programs such as providing information about their goals, eligibility criteria, and benefits. ▪ Foster close collaboration between community leaders and Black individuals in designing programs and initiatives. ▪ Strive for a balance between tailored support for Black individuals and other racial or ethnic groups, ensuring mitigation against further social exclusion. ▪ Forge connections with other organizations to facilitate networking with employers and improve labour market access. ▪ Include wrap-around supports such as financial assistance, transportation subsidies, childcare services, technology access, and other measures to alleviate barriers and ensure equitable program access. ▪ Value Black people as active participants in program design, implementation, and evaluation processes to foster ownership, accountability, and sustainable outcomes for Black participants.
Mentoring and support networks	▪ Consider mentoring as a key element of programming. ▪ Enhance existing bridging networks and develop new ones within Black communities. ▪ Actively involve youth in planning services and provide them with skills training for program evaluation in order to improve program outcomes. ▪ Implement fair employment criteria and coordinate job search assistance, including gender-specific skills programs. ▪ Educate employers on hiring practices and facilitate workplace integration through mentoring programs. ▪ Foster support in high schools, community organizations, and post-secondary education job training programs aimed at preparing individuals for the workforce. ▪ Emphasize mentoring as an empowerment mechanism that enhances labour market progression by expanding networks, refining job search skills, fostering confidence, and equipping individuals with culturally relevant skills. ▪ Collaborate with Black community organizations, leaders, and stakeholders to improve outreach, trust, and participation rates among Black people in Canada. ▪ Include the voices of employers in these collaborations.

Despite the limited evidence on the challenges and barriers to the participation of, and outcomes experienced by Black Canadians related to active employment measures, the significance of the present inquiry holds additional implications for policy formulation and program development. Moreover, by continuing to uncover the barriers that hinder Black peoples' access to employment and skills development opportunities, policymakers can better tailor interventions to address these systemic inequities effectively. Similarly, by identifying the facilitators that enable participation and success, stakeholders can design strategies to amplify these factors and promote more equitable outcomes for Black individuals across diverse sectors and industries. We close this report by discussing some key broader implications of the research findings.

Understanding and addressing the impact of systemic challenges pertaining to employment

The systemic challenges, particularly in terms of unemployment and social exclusion, are profound and multifaceted. As highlighted by Madut (2019), the over-representation of young Black people in correctional facilities underscores the urgent need for intervention. This disproportionality is primarily attributed to the intertwined issues of unemployment and social marginalization, according to Madut (2019). In provinces like Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario, the trend is particularly alarming, with a noticeable surge in the involvement of Black youth with the justice system (Madut, 2019). Without targeted interventions to address these employment challenges, the cycle of social exclusion and its consequences, including disproportionate representation in correctional facilities, is likely to persist and exacerbate.

Understanding the potential of these young individuals to contribute positively to society is essential. By neglecting to address the systemic and employment barriers they face, we risk perpetuating cycles of poverty, marginalization, and criminalization, which not only harm individuals but also strain communities and society as a whole. Therefore, proactive measures are essential to dismantle these systemic barriers and create pathways for inclusion, empowerment, and economic opportunity for all members of society, regardless of their background or circumstances. These measures may include ensuring equal access to resources such as education, healthcare, affordable housing, childcare, and transportation and investing in underprivileged communities through targeted economic development initiatives and infrastructure investments.

Engaging in systemic transformation to create equitable opportunities

Focusing solely on empowering individuals without addressing the underlying structural and systemic inequities is insufficient in creating meaningful and sustainable improvements in access to employment and training opportunities, particularly for Black people in Canada. The

importance of transforming the system lies in recognizing that disparities in access to opportunities are not due to inherent deficiencies in individuals, but rather are rooted in historical and ongoing inequities embedded within societal structures (Aaronson, Barnes, & Edelberg, 2021). These inequities manifest in various forms, including discriminatory hiring practices, unequal access to education and resources, and systemic barriers that limit upward mobility.

By addressing structural and systemic inequities, a more equitable playing field can be created where Black people in Canada have fair and equal opportunities to access employment and training programs. This requires implementing policies and initiatives that dismantle discriminatory practices, promote diversity and inclusion in workplaces and educational institutions, and invest in community-based programs that provide support and resources to marginalized communities. This included bridging this gap between policy objectives and employer engagement. Policymakers can better tailor ALMPs to meet the needs and expectations of both employers and job seekers, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of labour market interventions. Moreover, systemic transformation to increase equitable opportunities involve challenging and reimagining existing power dynamics and institutional norms to create environments that foster belonging and advancement for all individuals, regardless of their background. This approach not only addresses immediate barriers to access but also addresses the root causes of inequity, leading to more sustainable and transformative outcomes for individuals and society as a whole.

Investing in data collection and research to inform evidence-based practices

The literature underscores the necessity of disaggregating the broad category of "visible minority" in Canada to effectively address the unique experiences of Black individuals (e.g., British Columbia's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, 2020; Cukier et al., 2023; Foster et al., 2023; Jean-Pierre & James, 2022). This requires acknowledging and exploring the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, language, disability, and other aspects of identity. With the ongoing United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024), and renewed commitment by Trudeau (2024) until 2028, it becomes imperative for government agencies to collect race-based data to identify and tackle existing inequalities. Such data should not merely serve descriptive purposes but also inform concrete policies and practices across various institutions effectively (Jean-Pierre & James, 2022). As highlighted in Foster et al. (2023), the absence of detailed race data not only obscures the disproportionate impact of social systems on particular racial demographics but also hampers the capacity to monitor social issues effectively and offer timely solutions. The British Columbia Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (2020) presents a landmark report on disaggregated demographic data collection, offering a critical perspective on its importance in advancing equity goals. Emphasizing its vital

role, the report uncovers nuanced insights into diverse demographics and experiences, enabling
targeted interventions and policies to effectively address systemic inequities.

In the realm of ALMPs, it is crucial for ESDC to maintain alignment between policy objectives
and practical implementation. Despite the 2021/2022 Employment Insurance Monitoring and
Assessment Report underlining the commitment of LMDAs to supporting underrepresented
individuals, with a specific priority from the Government of Canada, there persists a notable gap
in evaluating the effectiveness of these agreements, particularly concerning specific visible
minority subgroups such as Black people.

Alignment between ALMPs and labour trends

As discussed earlier, the OECD (2021) highlighted the significance of flexible and agile ALMPs
amid the COVID-19 crisis. They stressed the need to focus on training approaches that enable
workforce reallocation and aid in economic restructuring. Labour market trends such as the
transition towards the green economy, increasing automation, and artificial intelligence pose
both opportunities and challenges for individuals from Black communities. Research by Ng and
Gagnon (2020) and Barata (2024) sheds light on the implications of these trends and
underscores the pressing need for reskilling initiatives.

The shift towards a greener economy presents opportunities for new job creation and economic
growth. However, without targeted efforts to ensure equitable access to these opportunities,
there is a risk that Black individuals may be left behind. Historically, marginalized communities,
including Black communities, have faced barriers to entry and advancement in emerging sectors.
Without proactive measures to address these barriers, there is a risk of perpetuating existing
disparities and exacerbating inequalities.

Furthermore, the increasing automation of jobs poses challenges for workers across various
industries, including those traditionally employing Black individuals. Automation has the
potential to displace workers, particularly those in low-skilled or routine-based occupations.
Without adequate preparation and upskilling initiatives, Black workers may face heightened
vulnerability to job loss and economic insecurity.

In light of these trends, there is a critical need for reskilling and upskilling programs tailored to
the needs of Black individuals. These programs should focus not only on technical skills but also
on fostering adaptability, creativity, and resilience in the face of changing labour market
dynamics. Moreover, efforts to ensure equitable access to education and training opportunities
are essential to address historical disparities in access to quality education and skills
development. By investing in reskilling initiatives and fostering an inclusive approach to
workforce development, society can empower Black individuals to thrive in the evolving labour
market. Moreover, by leveraging the talents and contributions of all members of society,

including those from marginalized communities, we can build a more equitable and sustainable economy for the future.

Key additional implications for policy and program development

- Consider targeted interventions that address the cycle of social exclusion and its consequences, including disproportionate representation of Black people in correctional facilities in Canada.

- Implement policies and initiatives that dismantle discriminatory practices, promote diversity and inclusion in workplaces and educational institutions, and invest in community-based programs that provide support and resources to marginalized communities.

- Ensure equal access to resources such as education, healthcare, affordable housing, childcare, and transportation.

- Invest in underprivileged communities through targeted economic development initiatives and infrastructure investments.

- Collect race-based data to identify and tackle existing inequalities in active employment measures.

- Invest in reskilling initiatives that foster an inclusive approach to workforce development and responds to current labour trends such as increased automation, the transition to a green autonomy, and the influence of AI.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present research project underscores the critical importance of dedicated efforts to facilitate access to training and employment programs for Black people in Canada. Our findings illuminate the entrenched systemic barriers that hinder equitable participation in education and workforce development initiatives, perpetuating cycles of marginalization and exclusion.

We recognize that addressing these disparities is not merely a moral imperative but also a necessity for advancing social inclusion and economic prosperity. By dismantling barriers to access and fostering inclusive policies and practices, we can unlock the immense potential of Black people and harness their talents to drive innovation and sustainable growth.

Moreover, our research underscores the need for collaborative action among policymakers, educational institutions, employers, and community stakeholders to implement targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by Black people in Canada. By leveraging evidence-based insights and adopting a multidimensional approach to workforce development, we can create pathways for equitable opportunity and empowerment.

In essence, our research underscores the urgency of prioritizing equity and inclusion in training and employment programs to ensure that Black people in Canada have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to society and realize their full potential.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF CURRENT ACTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS PROGRAMS THAT TARGET BLACK PEOPLE IN CANADA

Organization	Program description	URL
Black Entrepreneurship Program	▪ Partnership between the Government of Canada, Black-led business organizations, and financial institutions. ▪ With an investment of up to $265 million over four years, aims to help Black business owners and entrepreneurs grow their businesses.	https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/black-entrepreneurship-program/en
Youth Employment Skills Strategy	▪ The government is investing $4.78 million through YESS to help Black youth gain employment experience.	https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/youth-employment-strategy.html
Black-led Philanthropic Endowment Fund	▪ The government of Canada has provided a $200 million Black-led endowment fund as a source of funding for non-profits that are Black-led, Black-focused, and Black serving.	https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/black-led-philanthropic-fund.html
Future Skills Centre – The Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity's Strength in Structure project	▪ Engaged Black youth and a number of Black-led organizations to develop a toolkit that is intended to improve delivery of services to meet the needs of Black youth job seekers. ▪ The toolkit was piloted by three Black-led organizations: Rise in STEM, DYLOTT, and Life of Hope Foundation.	https://fsc-ccf.ca/projects/strength-in-structure-2/

Organization	Program description	URL
Supporting Black Canadian Communities Initiative	▪ SBCCI is a federal grants and contributions initiative that was created to celebrate Black history and contributions, build capacity, reflect Black voices, and aid in the reduction of anti-Black racism and other systemic inequities.	https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2023/11/call-for-proposals-launched-under-the-supporting-black-canadian-communities-initiative.html
The Black Business Initiative (BBI)	▪ Aims to address the needs of Atlantic Canada's Black business Community. ▪ Supports job creation, equitable partnership, and advancing economic prosperity of Canada.	https://www.bbi.ca/
The Diversity and Inclusion Program	▪ This initiative works with African Nova Scotians and persons of African descent to open doors and create meaningful employment opportunities. ▪ Designed to aid in the diversification of Nova Scotia Works Employment Centres to better reflect the community.	https://www.stfxemploymentinnovation.ca/diversity-and-inclusion-program/
The Black Youth Action Plan (BYAP)	▪ The Ontario government is investing an additional $14 million in BYAP to help Black youth access employment opportunities and career-building resources.	https://www.ontario.ca/page/black-youth-action-plan
Developing Young Leaders of Tomorrow, Today (DYLOTT)	▪ Delivers a variety of youth programs to ensure young Black leaders have the tools to excel in the current and emerging Canadian and International job market. ▪ Supports and services include: mentoring and mentorship opportunities, intensive training and skill development, and innovative sector-specific knowledge.	https://www.dylott.com/

Organization	Program description	URL
Rise in STEM	▪ The mission is to level the playing field for Black youth by breaking down barriers to higher education and STEM career pathways. ▪ Provides resources and opportunities to enhance well-being, leadership, and technical skills.	https://www.riseinstem.ca/
Lifelong Leadership Institute	▪ An educational organization that provides innovative leadership development to Canadian youth of Jamaican, African-Caribbean and Black heritage, so that they may fulfill their personal and professional ambitions.	https://llileaders.com/overview-of-the-lli/
Africa Centre	▪ Through the program "Boost Pathways to Success" Afro-Canadian youth are provided with opportunities to learn through mentorship and taking part in pre-employment skills training that includes developing interview skills, how to conduct jobs searches, and effective resume writing skills.	https://africacentre.ca
Afro Caribbean Business Network	▪ ACBN is a leader in unifying and educating African and Caribbean entrepreneurs in the various ways that they can successfully and sustainably grow their businesses. ▪ ACBN's objective is to provide Black businesses with the resources they need to start, grow, and scale up.	https://acbncanada.com/
Black Community Employment and Empowerment Services	▪ Founded to help integrate newcomers by bridging the gap between employers and job seekers.	https://bceescanada.org/

Organization	Program description	URL
Black North Connect Program	▪ One stop platform to provide access to internships and job postings for Black Canadians.	https://blacknorth.ca/programs/blacknorth-connect-program/
Canadian Black Scientists Network	▪ CBSN is a national coalition of Black people possessing or pursuing higher degrees in STEM.	https://blackscientists.ca/
CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals	▪ CEE addresses the economic and social barriers that impact Black youth. Their work is focused on workforce development, education, and advocacy. ▪ CEE provides a variety of programs that aim to improve the careers, education, and empowerment of young Black professionals. Their programs are holistic, person-centered, and culturally relevant.	https://ceecentre.org/
DIGITAL	▪ Provides technology skills training, mentorship, and job placement to Black Canadians.	https://www.digitalsupercluster.ca/projects/introducing-black-canadians-to-tech-skills-jobs/#:~:text=Throughper cent20anper cent20empoweringper cent20approachper cent20of,overper cent20theper cent20nextper cent20fiveper cent20years.
Federation of Black Canadians	▪ National organization that represents the interests of Black Canadians.	https://fbcfcn.ca/
Future Black Female	▪ Seeks to empower Black girls and women between the ages of 16-22 to take charge of their education and careers.	https://www.futureblackfemale.com/

Organization	Program description	URL
Neighbourhood Developing Careers (NDC Trades)	▪ Seeks to bridge the information gap between high school students from the BIPOC community and other underrepresented groups about career options in the skilled construction trades.	https://www.ndctrades.ca/
Skills for Change's Black Community Access and Programming	▪ Provides programs that focus on entrepreneurship, STEM, mentorship, etc., to the Black community.	https://skillsforchange.org/bcap

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