



State of Black Economics Report (SOBER) 2025

Insights on Education,
Employment and
Entrepreneurship



Partners



The Diversity Institute conducts and coordinates multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder research to address the needs of diverse Canadians, the changing nature of skills and competencies, and the policies, processes and tools that advance economic inclusion and success. Our action-oriented, evidence-based approach is advancing knowledge of the complex barriers faced by under-represented groups, leading practices to effect change, and producing concrete results. The Diversity Institute is a research lead for the Future Skills Centre.



The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development so that everyone in Canada can be prepared for the future of work. We partner with policymakers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure that everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. We are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and are funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

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Executive Summary

Background

Canada has a deep commitment to human rights and equity embedded in our Constitution, Charter of Rights and Freedoms, legislative frameworks and judicial decisions. Despite backlash, most organizations remain committed to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) not just because of their obligations under law, but because of its links to organizational performance in an increasingly diverse environment. Access to talent and markets, as well as strong innovation, employee engagement and productivity, are all tied to creating diverse, equitable and inclusive work environments.

Canada's Black population has grown significantly over the last two decades and now accounts for 4.3% of the Canadian population. This diverse community includes those with deep historical roots, particularly in Atlantic Canada, alongside recent migrants from the Caribbean, Africa and beyond. Notably, 60% of Black Canadians were born outside the country. This diversity brings a rich array of cultures, religions, languages and experiences that contribute to the vibrancy of Black communities countrywide.

However, Canada's history of slavery, segregation and deeply embedded anti-Black racism continues to shape its institutions, including media, housing, health care, the justice system and access to services. This report will focus on the aspects most directly related to economic disparity – education, employment, leadership and entrepreneurship – while recognizing the complex relationships across dimension.

There is considerable research that traces the contributions of the Black population to generating wealth for others. This research also outlines the ways in which the history of slavery, segregation and anti-Black racism in education, employment and entrepreneurship have prevented Black Canadians from creating and accumulating wealth for themselves. The data clearly show higher levels of poverty for Black Canadians, as well as lower levels of property ownership and less intergenerational wealth than other segments of the population. While median income of Black Canadians has increased in recent years, a significant gap remains.

Systemic racism against Black Canadians is deeply embedded in societal structures, institutions and individual attitudes. This limits economic inclusion and social mobility. The United Nations defines systemic racism against Africans and people of African descent as “the operation of complex, interrelated systems of laws, policies, practices and attitudes in governmental institutions, the private sector and societal structures that, combined, result in direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional, *de jure* or *de facto* discrimination, distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin.” Addressing these issues requires comprehensive and integrated solutions based on disaggregated data and an intersectional approach, recognizing how racism impacts individuals differently based on gender identity, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation and other dimensions of identity.

This report, the State of Black Economics Report, synthesizes the latest data and research on key areas of economic advancement for Black Canadians, including education, employment and entrepreneurship. It focuses on actionable strategies to foster inclusion within the skills and employment ecosystem.



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Education

While progress is undeniable and education gaps are narrowing, the Canadian education system, shaped by systemic discrimination, continues to marginalize Black students. Black people are underrepresented as teachers, guidance counsellors and principals, as well as among the faculty members and administrators in post-secondary institutions who help to shape curriculum, pedagogy and services. For more than a century, Eurocentric curriculum omitted the history of enslavement and segregation and erased the contributions of Black people.

Practices such as streaming Black youth into vocational programs and away from university, the lack of role models and absences of wraparound supports to address gaps have limited opportunities for advancement and pathways to post-secondary education.



Research also shows that Black youth, particularly boys, face disproportionately high disciplinary actions and low expectations from teachers, which discourages academic persistence. While promising practices have focused on addressing these barriers, there is still fragmentation and disaggregated data is limited, inhibiting our ability to track progress.

These challenges extend to post-secondary education, where Black professors are underrepresented among tenured faculty and administrators as well as career support services. This reduces access to academic role models and culturally appropriate approaches. While university graduation rates for Black Canadians now align with national levels, this increase is largely driven by immigration. Canadian-born Black students still enroll at lower rates. Moreover, Black students remain underrepresented in high-paying fields like engineering and medicine, which limits economic mobility and diversity in influential industries. There is ample evidence that access to financial and social capital play a significant role in shaping student opportunities.

Addressing these disparities requires proactive measures. Education drives social and economic advancement, making early investment in equitable K-12 education essential. Implementing culturally responsive teaching, increasing Black representation in curricula and enforcing fair disciplinary policies can create a more inclusive learning environment.

Employment

Systemic barriers in Canada's labour market continue to limit Black Canadians' economic opportunities, leading to higher unemployment, lower wages and underrepresentation in high paying roles. Despite bridging the education gap, Black Canadians are twice as likely to be employed in roles requiring only a high school education or less. This disparity highlights the persistent impact of anti-Black racism in the labour market.

Discrimination against Black Canadians extends across all aspects of employment, including hiring, promotion practices and workplace interactions. A recent Environics survey found that Black Canadians are more likely than other racialized groups to experience workplace discrimination, and Black women also experience gender-based discrimination. Addressing this problem requires a laser focus on labour market trends and ensuring Black job seekers have access to the skills needed, including digital skills, as well as the required wraparound supports.

For example, there is considerable evidence that work-integrated learning is one of the most effective ways of creating pathways to employment, but Black job seekers often have fewer opportunities because of structural issues. It also requires addressing the demand side of the equation. Employers need to build inclusive practices in job design, recruitment, selection, development and advancement, while addressing pathways to leadership.

A diversity and inclusion lens must also be embedded into governance and strategy, culture and partnerships, as well as the entire organizational value chain: procurement, product and service design, sales and marketing and support. Many organizations are open to new approaches, but need support to develop and implement effective strategies.

Leadership

Representation in leadership is significant, as it influences economic opportunities and workplace experiences, and is also an indicator of societal inclusion and belonging. Black leaders have made impressive gains across sectors and have broken through barriers, serving as elected officials and cabinet ministers and as senior administrators, particularly at the federal level.



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They have also served as judges, university presidents, leaders of non-profits and private sector corporations, as well as leaders of agencies, board and commissions. In some communities, Black leadership on boards is approaching the level of Black representation in the overall community. However, Black Canadians remain underrepresented in leadership roles, including executive and board positions overall. Legislation and regulatory requirements, mentoring, coaching and sponsorship, as well as voluntary codes such as the Black North Initiative, have all played important roles, but more is needed. Highlighting and celebrating examples of success are also important because, as we know: “If you can’t see it, you can’t be it.”

Entrepreneurship

Small and medium-sized businesses are the backbone of the Canadian economy and entrepreneurship is a critical driver to prosperity, innovation and sustainability. Although Black people account for 4.3% of the population, they are majority owners of less than 1% of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Black women are majority owners of 38.8% of these SMEs, twice the proportion of the 17.8% of all businesses that are majority-owned by women. Most Black entrepreneurs are self-employed, although Black people are also a smaller proportion of self-employed. Black-owned businesses are smaller, less likely to have employees and tend to be concentrated in service sectors.

Some Black Canadians turn to entrepreneurship due to barriers in traditional employment, while others pursue it for the opportunities it offers. Research shows that Black-owned businesses, regardless of motivation, face systemic challenges, including difficulty accessing funding, establishing credibility, building a customer base and lack of relevant support services. Black women entrepreneurs face greater obstacles to securing funding than others. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these barriers, with Black business owners more likely to report difficulties securing government support or avoiding additional debt. These disparities reflect structural inequalities in Canada’s entrepreneurial ecosystem, emphasizing the need for targeted support to ensure Black entrepreneurs have equitable opportunities.

Understanding the barriers and enablers for Black entrepreneurs requires bringing a gender and diversity analysis to the entrepreneurial ecosystem: the interconnected set of players and processes at the societal, organizational and individual levels. Research has found that these ecosystems systematically exclude women, immigrants and other diverse entrepreneurs, including Black entrepreneurs.

Enabling conditions play a critical role at the societal level. These include socio-economic conditions, infrastructure, policies and programs, cultural values and stereotypes. Organizational policies and practices among key organizations, such as financial and



Better disaggregated data is essential to fully understand disparities in education, employment, leadership and entrepreneurship and would enable policymakers to set targets and track progress.

educational institutions, investors, business intermediaries, incubators and accelerators, as well as among large customers, also play a role. At the individual level, human, financial and social capital play an important role.

We need to consider the knowledge, skills and motivations of Black entrepreneurs. At the same time, attention must be focused on individuals who are gatekeepers and decision-makers whose bias, experiences and lack of understanding can present barriers. In recent years, major players have developed programs targeting Black entrepreneurs with financing, mentoring, skills and capacity building. However, work must continue to understand the dynamics of the ecosystem, what works for whom and ways to challenge embedded anti-Black racism.

Recommendations and conclusions

Whether we are looking at education, employment, leadership or entrepreneurship, it is clear there are no simple solutions to complex problems.

Better disaggregated data is essential to fully understand disparities in education, employment, leadership and entrepreneurship and would enable policymakers to set targets and track progress. At the societal level, broader structural forces — including systemic racism, stereotypes, media representation, government policies and infrastructure — shape access to opportunities for Black Canadians. The media plays an influential role in shaping public perception and reinforcing or challenging societal norms. Like other sectors with outsized influence, such as law, government and the justice system, the media must improve Black representation in leadership roles, as well as in mentorship and role model positions.

Legislation, voluntary codes and policies also play an important role. Canada's Employment Equity Act has a positive impact by requiring federally regulated corporations to report on representation and strategies to advance designated groups, including women, Indigenous Peoples, racialized people and persons with disabilities. Recent recommendations suggest that Black Canadians should be recognized as a separate designated group due to their unique historical and systemic challenges.

Voluntary codes like the 50 — 30 Challenge, which aims at advancing gender parity and increased diversity on boards and in senior roles across sectors, and the BlackNorth Initiative, which specifically targets increasing representation of Black people in corporate leadership, hold promise in promoting coordinated action.

Additionally, government social policies in health, child care and immigration are essential for addressing long-standing economic and social inequities and programs targeting the Black community to level the playing field are critical. Applying an anti-racism lens to policy design and evaluation ensures that efforts to advance equity are integrated across all levels of government and that we understand what works for whom.

At the organizational level, businesses, government agencies, educational institutions and service providers shape economic and social outcomes through their policies and practices. Bringing a gender and diversity lens across all aspects of an organization, including governance and strategy, human resources, workplace culture, metrics, the value chain and community engagement, can ensure that commitments to EDI and anti-Black racism are embedded in institutional frameworks. Many employers are beginning to acknowledge systemic barriers and implement strategies to foster inclusion and advance Black professionals into leadership roles. However, financial and post-secondary institutions, business support organizations and other institutions can do more to support Black-owned businesses. This is crucial for building generational wealth.

At the individual level, it's essential to equip Black Canadians with resources and support at every stage of the talent pipeline, from education to employment and leadership. However, the focus should not be on fixing Black communities, but on transforming societal attitudes and eliminating systemic biases. Canadians must deepen their understanding of the legacy of slavery, segregation and anti-Black racism to understand bias and how it is manifest, confront personal biases and learn how to be effective allies.

Overall, the State of Black Economics Report offers good news – evidence of significant progress in key areas known to drive economic development. However, there is more to be done. In the U.S., we have seen a backlash and attacks on EDI that threaten to undermine commitments to combatting anti-Black racism across education, employment, leadership and entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, the evidence remains strong. Advancing Black prosperity is not simply a matter of human rights or social justice, but fundamental to Canada's prosperity and sustainability.

Introduction

Context

However imperfectly executed, a commitment to human rights, equity and substantive equality is the foundation of Canada's Constitution, Charter of Rights and Freedoms, much legislation and judicial decisions. Equity or substantive equality is not about treating everyone the same, but instead recognizes how historic oppression and exclusion has created disadvantages for certain segments of the population that need to be addressed to ensure fairness.

At the same time, a strong business case can continue to be made for equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) as Canada's population changes. This will ensure access to talent and markets, as well as the increased innovation and productivity that will strengthen Canada's economic performance, sustainability and inclusion.

Canada has long had instruments in place aimed at addressing racial discrimination and advancing equity for racialized populations (referred to as "visible minorities" in existing legislation). However, there has been increasing awareness of the need to recognize the distinct experiences of Black people,

as well as intersections between different dimensions of identity such as gender, religion, age and more. While Canadians have long been unaware or in denial of anti-Black racism, in recent years it has been officially recognized as a distinct form of discrimination. There have been calls to add the Black community, along with the 2SLGBTQ+ community, to the designated groups covered by the Employment Equity Act (1995) legislation, for example.

The challenges facing the Black community in Canada extend to virtually every corner of life: media, government, education, housing, health care, the justice system, access to services and more. However, this report will focus on some key issues associated with the economic advancement of Black people, including education, employment, leadership and entrepreneurship, while recognizing the interactions between other facets of life.

Black economics

A growing number of scholars have focused on the ways that economic systems have embedded racism and how, for example, slavery was the foundation of wealth creation for many white and privileged people.^{1, 2, 3}



Black homeownership in Canada is nearly one-half that of non-racialized households (38.4% vs. 70.3%), reinforcing economic inequalities.

The data in Canada make clear that current systems do not provide equal access to economic opportunities and prosperity, because historical racial divisions directly and indirectly reinforce inequality.⁴ We see this in unequal access to educational opportunities, higher rates of unemployment,⁵ low-wage and precarious labour,⁶ unequal access to resources and lack of social capital,^{7, 8} low levels of generational wealth,⁹ and systemic financial discrimination.^{10, 11} Applying a gender and diversity lens reveals the ways in which discrimination is often embedded in organizational structures and contexts that perpetuate exclusion and reinforce the importance of examining how anti-Black racism impedes economic progress.¹²

Research in Canada, as in the U.S., highlights significant racial wealth disparities, emphasizing systemic barriers that have hindered Black economic development.^{13, 14, 15} The Royal Bank of Canada reports that racialized individuals, particularly Black people, face limited opportunities to build wealth due to lower financial assets, as well as lower rates of business and home ownership.

Black homeownership in Canada is nearly one-half that of non-racialized households (38.4% vs. 70.3%), reinforcing economic inequalities.¹⁶

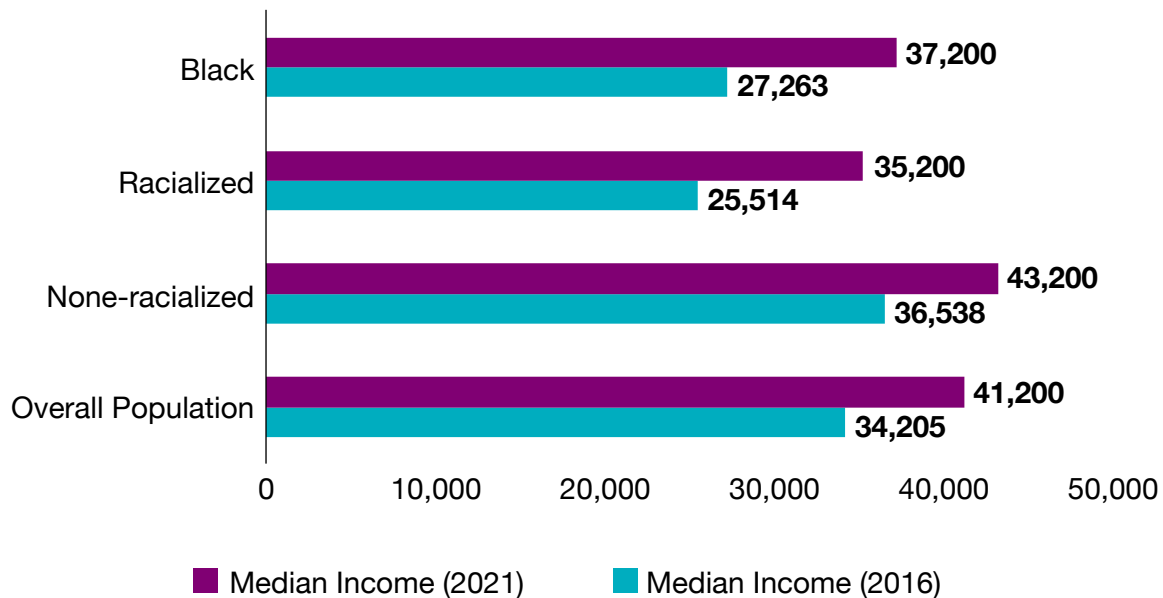
Income disparities

Income disparities remain a persistent challenge for Black Canadians despite notable increases in median income over recent years. Between 2016 and 2021, the median income of Black Canadians rose 35.7%, from \$27,263 to \$37,200.¹⁷ This growth is substantial but, as Figure 1 shows, the Black median income remains significantly lower than that of the overall (\$41,200) and non-racialized (\$43,200) populations.¹⁸ These income disparities highlight systemic economic barriers that continue to hold Black Canadians back from achieving financial equity.

The economic challenges faced by Black Canadians extend beyond income disparities and into higher poverty rates. The proportion of Black Canadians living in low-income conditions (15.0%) is notably higher than that of the non-racialized population (10.3%).¹⁹ More concerning is that while poverty rates among other racialized groups tend to decrease with each successive generation, Black Canadians consistently experience higher poverty rates than their non-racialized counterparts across all generations.^{20, 21} For example, third-generation (or more) Black individuals have a poverty rate of 12%, more than double that of non-racialized individuals in the same generational category.²²

Figure 1

Median income for people between the ages of 25 and 45 in Canada, 2016 and 2021



Source: Statistics Canada. (2022). Visible minority by income, detailed income sources and generation status: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=9810033401>

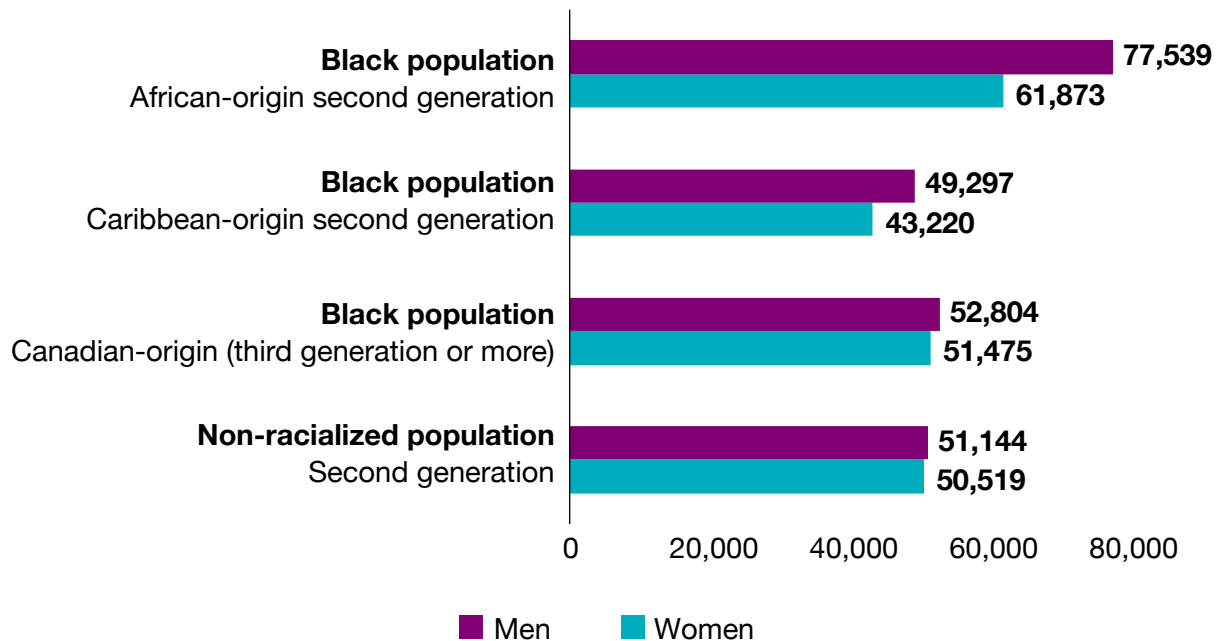
Statistics Canada. (2017). 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016210. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=110562&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2017&THEME=120&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=>

Statistics Canada data further reveal nuances of income inequality within the Black community. For example, Black men from a Canadian-origin background face the largest earnings disparity compared to their non-racialized peers, with an income gap of \$16,300. African-origin Black men have a smaller earnings disparity at \$8,500.²³

A similar pattern is observed among Black women, with Canadian-origin Black women earning \$9,500 less than non-racialized third-generation women, while Caribbean-origin women face a smaller gap of \$1,300. Interestingly, African-origin Black women surpass their non-racialized counterparts by \$3,100 in earnings.²⁴

Figure 2

Average earnings of Black and non-racialized populations aged 25 to 54 by gender in Canada, 2021



Source: Wall, K., & Wood, S. (2023). *Education and earnings of Canadian-born Black populations*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2023001/article/00009-eng.htm>

These statistics underscore the systemic challenges Black Canadians face in employment and income growth. Racial discrimination in hiring and promotion practices, workplace biases and limited access to economic opportunities contribute to these persistent income disparities. Addressing these challenges requires targeted policies that promote economic equity, eliminate barriers to career advancement and ensure fair compensation for Black Canadians across all sectors.²⁵

The diversity of Canada's Black population

Canada's Black population has been growing steadily, reaching 1.5 million in 2021 (4.3% of the total population) up from 950,000 (2.9% or 2.2%) in 2011 (see Figure 3).^{26, 27, 28, 29}

This growth is largely driven by immigration, with nearly 60% of Black Canadians born outside the country. Of these newcomers, 32.6% originate from Africa (including Nigeria, Ethiopia etc) and 21.0% from the Caribbean (including Jamaica and Haiti), while 23% of them have arrived since 2016. This population is highly diverse, with 25.6% identifying as belonging to more than one ethnic group.

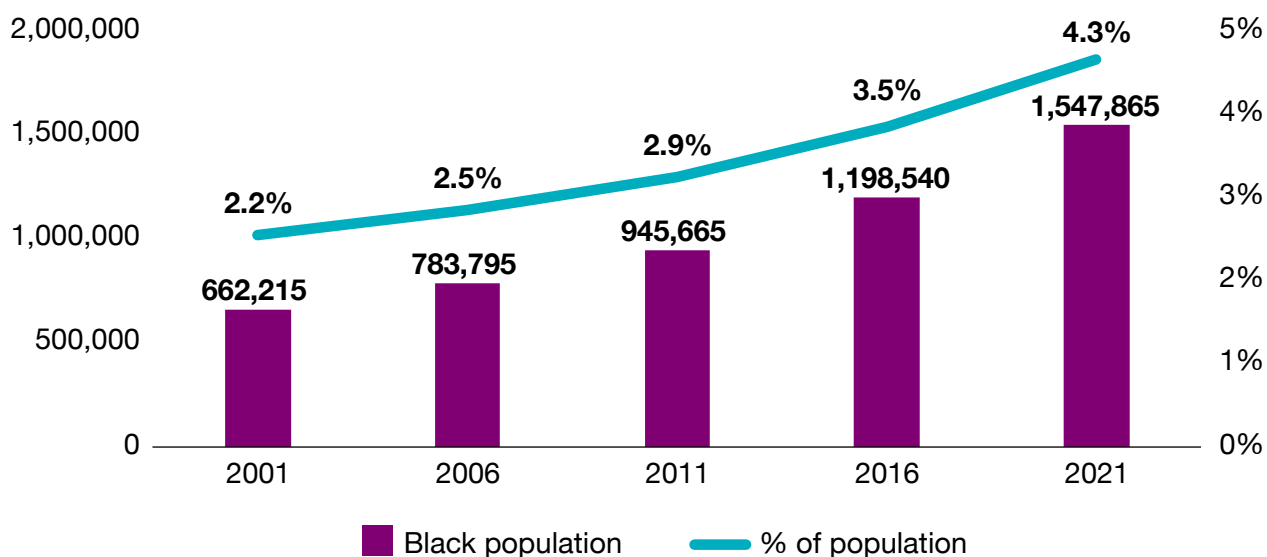
Among Black Canadians, the largest reported backgrounds include individuals of African continental origin (15.7%), Jamaican heritage (13.0%), and Haitian heritage (10.8%).³⁰

African in this context refers to individuals who trace their ancestry to specific African countries or ethnic groups, rather than a singular ethnicity. Nearly one-half (49.7%) reside in Ontario, where they are the third-largest racialized group in the Greater Toronto Area. Quebec (27.3%) and Alberta (11.5%) also have substantial Black communities, reflecting an expanding presence across the country.^{31, 32} Additionally, 2.2% of the Black population in Canada aged 15 years and older lives with a disability, underscoring the importance of inclusive policies and services.^{33, 34}



Figure 3

Growth of the Black population in Canada: Total numbers and percentage of the overall population, 2001–2021



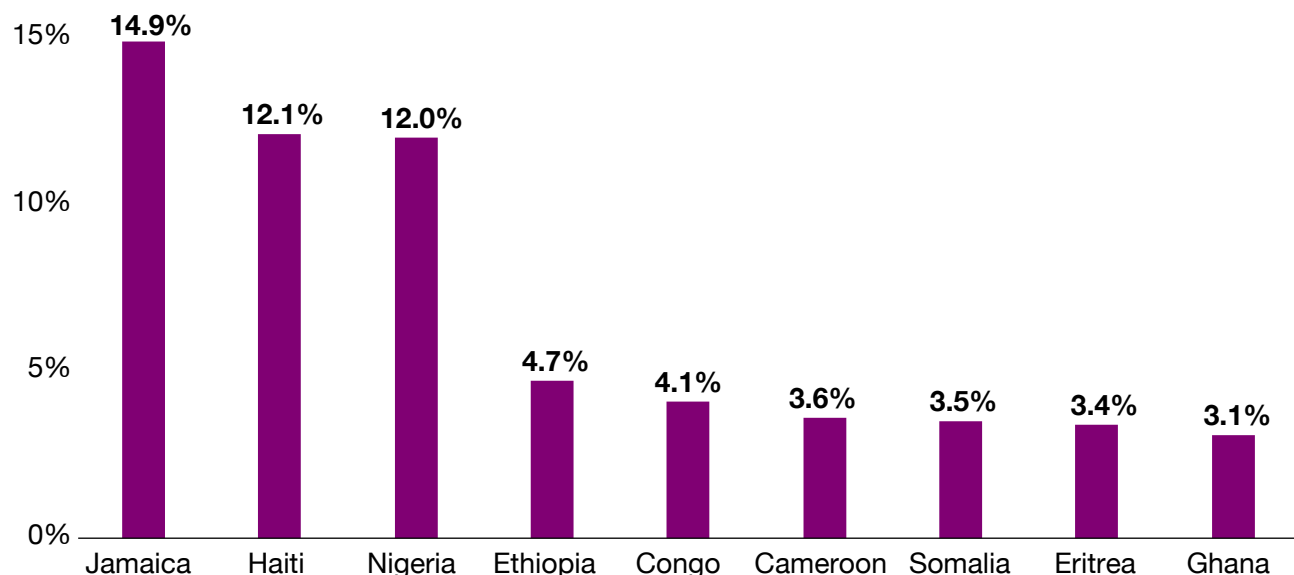
Source: Statistics Canada, various reports (2003, 2009, 2013, 2015, 2023).

Black Canadians have deep historical roots. Communities date back centuries, particularly in the Atlantic provinces, where many are descendants of Loyalists and formerly enslaved people. Over the years, waves of immigration from the Caribbean and, more recently, Africa have shaped and diversified the Black community.³⁵ This evolving demographic landscape has been further influenced by Canada's points-based immigration system, which has facilitated the arrival of highly educated African immigrants.³⁶ These new arrivals contribute to the already rich cultural fabric of Black Canada, blending their traditions with those of earlier generations and reinforcing the community's resilience, growth and influence across the nation.^{37, 38}

The Black Canadian population is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse groups in the country, representing more than 300 ethnic and cultural origins (see Figure 4). Linguistically, the community is also highly varied. While 58.9% of Black Canadians report English as their mother tongue and 21.6% report French, more than 450 other languages are also spoken, reflecting the community's African, Caribbean and global roots. Black Canadians also have diverse religions with over one quarter identifying as Christian (26%) and 12% as Muslim (12%) much higher than in the overall population. The impact of intersecting identities often adds layers of discrimination.

Figure 4

Countries of birth for the Black population born outside Canada, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada. (2024). *Visible minority by place of birth and generation status: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=9810032601>

Demographically, the Black population in Canada is notably younger than the national average, with a median age of 30.2 years compared to 41.2 years for the total population.³⁹ This youthful composition is evident in the higher percentage of Black people under 15 (26.1%) compared to only 16.1% for Canada's total population, a demographic trend that signifies the community's future growth and influence.⁴⁰

Conversely, the proportion of Black Canadians aged 65 years and older is relatively small (7.4%),⁴¹ highlighting differences in generational distribution when compared to the overall population (18.9%).⁴² Generational differences within the Black population further illustrate this trend. In 2021, Canadian-born Black individuals had a median age of 15.5 years, while the median age of foreign-born Black individuals was 40.⁴³ The age dichotomy arises from Canada's adult-focused recruitment of foreign-born Black individuals in their prime working age, high immigrant fertility rates and the larger proportion of youth among the second-generation Black population.⁴⁴ These demographic patterns, shaped by historical and recent immigration trends, underscore the community's vital role in shaping Canada's economic, cultural and social future.^{45, 46}



Slavery, segregation and anti-Black racism in Canada

Anti-Black racism is a specific type of racism that systematically targets Black people, shaping their experiences in ways that are deeply rooted in history and economic systems and reinforced by modern institutions.⁴⁷ Anti-Black racism is built on the historical legacies of slavery, colonialism, segregation and racial hierarchies that have disproportionately affected Black people and continue to influence policies and social attitudes today.⁴⁸ Historical racial division has directly and indirectly maintained economic and social hierarchies. This has caused a ripple effect over time, permeating its effects through society and manifesting in contemporary forms of discrimination. Anti-Black racism is about a system that creates barriers for Black people in education, employment, housing, health care and policing, which makes it harder for them to succeed and thrive.⁴⁹

Many Canadians have been raised in an environment which has tended to ignore or downplay the history of slavery, segregation and anti-Black racism in Canada.⁵⁰ While there have been shifts over time in the attention being paid to Black history since the first formal course was added to the Ontario curriculum in the 1970's, levels of awareness remain low. While many are proud of Canada's role in the Underground Railroad,⁵¹ few are taught the full extent of Canada's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade or post-emancipation anti-Black racism, which

included state-sanctioned abuse, exploitation and segregation of Black people. For example, free and formerly enslaved Black American immigrants faced racial segregation in schools after settling in Canada West (now Ontario).⁵²

The history of slavery in Canada is important to acknowledge because it shaped the systemic barriers that still persist for Black people today and because the history of slavery in Canada is distinct from other countries like the USA. Slavery was a common practice that spanned nearly 200 years between the 17th to 19th centuries and primarily took place in the Atlantic provinces, Quebec and Ontario.⁵³ Indigenous Peoples were among the first to be forced into labour and sold into slavery, with the enslavement of Black people growing during the transatlantic slave trade.⁵⁴ Historians estimate that there were 4000 slaves of African descent in the British and French colonies between circa 1629 and 1834.⁵⁵ In Canada, the enslavement of Black people served more of a domestic role compared to an economic one in the USA since there were no large plantations in Canada.⁵⁶ In these domestic settings, enslaved persons were subject to physical, psychological, sexual and reproductive violence.⁵⁷

Enslaved people of both Indigenous and African descent resisted the system and legislation slowly began to work its way towards abolition in Upper Canada, which was likely aided by the fact that slavery was not a driving economic force.⁵⁸



Efforts to advance equity whether for Black people or Indigenous peoples or other “equity deserving groups” are grounded in the recognition of how historic oppression, exploitation and exclusion have created structural disadvantage.

However, after the abolition of slavery in 1834, Black people still faced significant racism, prejudice and discrimination in a country that had a two-century history of slavery. It was only in the 1950s and 1960s that government protections were established for housing, education and employment restrictions for Black people.⁵⁹

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Most Canadian institutions including education, the justice system, employment system, health systems have embedded anti-Black racism in their very systems.^{60, 61} The stereotypes which shape the experiences of Black people are deeply ingrained on our culture and reinforced in the media as well as in daily practices. Content analysis of

media representations have demonstrated the misrepresentation of the community, the over emphasis for example on crime and the silences on Black achievements.^{62, 63}

The impact of this on the Black community is significant both in terms of reinforcing negative stereotypes, omitting positive role models and fueling distrust of institutions.

Representation of Black people in Canadian media and news can either combat or perpetuate harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about Black Canadians.⁶⁴ Media shapes and reflects public awareness and judgements, and public opinion often directly reflects stereotypes about underrepresented groups which contribute to biases that negatively affect progress towards addressing racial issues at a societal level. Recent research shows that when there is a lack of contact between racial groups, people tend to rely on media stereotypes to formulate ideas about people outside their race.⁶⁵

Moreover, depiction and representation in entertainment media can carry a profound effect on younger more impressionable populations and how they see themselves. A 2021 study by the Canadian Centre for Digital Media Literacy found that children aged nine to 12 years were more than twice as likely to indicate a casting preference of a white actor for a hero role (52%) compared to a Black actor (19%).⁶⁶

While media portrayals of the Black population in Canada vary and positive depictions exist, research has shown that negative and stereotypical portrayals are still prevalent.⁶⁷

A media discourse analysis study, part of the Anti-Racism Action Program (ARAP), found that the Black community in Canada continues to face increased coverage and deep-seated stereotypes related to criminality, inferiority, and are too often the subject of cautionary tales.⁶⁸ This narrative of Black people is detrimental to their place in society, as it builds a divisive public discourse and mentality, when the Canadian mindset should instead be one of togetherness and unity.

Ensuring diverse perspectives in new reporting and portrayals across different forms of media is fundamental, and it is important to challenge racist narratives or stereotypes that might go otherwise unnoticed.⁶⁹ A 2024 survey of 5,806 journalists from 270 newsrooms in Canada found that 77% of journalists identify as white and only 3.5% identify as Black.⁷⁰ Supervisory and leadership roles are also disproportionately held by individuals who are white (83.4% and 80.5%).⁷¹ This can lead to a lack of perspectives and experiences from Black community members.

Balanced news reporting — showing Black people in all dimensions of life, including positive stories and celebrating the success and achievements of the Black community — is critical to shaping perceptions and aspirations.

While marked by oppression, the history of Black people in Canada also demonstrates resistance and perseverance. Black Canadians have been at the forefront of advocacy, community building and cultural contributions that have shaped the country.^{72, 73} Despite rich diversity, the experiences of Black Canadians, particularly those from the Caribbean, are often overshadowed by narratives centered on Black Americans.^{74, 75} Recent years have seen more concerted efforts to celebrate the contributions of Black people to Canadian history as well as to celebrate Black excellence and leadership.

Almost half of Black Canadians report experiencing discrimination (46%) likely to experience discrimination with significant increases during COVID.^{76, 77} The most cited forms of discrimination are based on race or skin colour (41%) and ethnicity or culture (27%).^{78, 79} Anti-Black racism is widespread in everyday settings, restricting Black Canadians' access to economic and social mobility. The most common locations where Black individuals report experiencing racial bias include stores, banks or restaurants (51%).

Black Canadians face disproportionate surveillance and violence.⁸⁰ Numerous studies in different contexts show that they are far more likely to be randomly stopped by police than others^{81, 82, 83} and in Toronto, Black Canadians are 20 times more likely to be fatally shot by police compared to white Canadians.⁸⁴ The racial disparities in policing practices and not only reinforce the deep mistrust between Black communities and





Education is one of the most significant areas where systemic discrimination persists. Black youth face structural disadvantages that result in lower post-secondary enrolment and graduation rates, limiting their career prospects and contributing to long-term economic inequality.

law enforcement and the justice system but spill over into other aspects of life affecting physical and mental wellbeing, the sense of belonging, education and employment opportunities and more.

Health is intrinsically linked to economic prosperity. Poor physical and mental health can impede labour market participation, limit access to educational opportunities and restrict financial stability.⁸⁵ However, Canada's healthcare system has struggled to address the specific needs of Black Canadians, often due to systemic racism within medical institutions.⁸⁶ Anti-Black racism in healthcare has been recognized as a "major public health concern."^{87, 88} Chronic stress and trauma associated with racial discrimination negatively impact workforce participation and productivity. Addressing social determinants of health, such as housing, education and income inequality, will also improve overall well-being and economic participation for Black communities.⁸⁹

Education is one of the most significant areas where systemic discrimination persists.⁹⁰ Black youth face structural disadvantages that result in lower post-secondary enrolment and graduation rates, limiting their career prospects and contributing to long-term economic inequality.⁹¹

These disparities extend into the labour market, where nearly 47% of Black Canadians report experiencing racial discrimination at work.⁹² Black women face even greater challenges, experiencing both race- and gender-based discrimination at a rate of 38%, compared to 26% of women overall.⁹³ The consequences of workplace bias are severe, limiting career advancement and undermining individuals. Among Black workers who report fair or poor mental health, 31% have experienced racial discrimination in the workplace, compared to 24% of those with better mental health.

Beyond overt discrimination, anti-Black racism also appears in more subtle ways, such as microaggressions. These everyday insults or demeaning comments may even go unnoticed by those who perpetuate them. A study found that 94% of Black respondents had experienced at least one microaggression, including comments like "I'm not racist. I have Black friends."⁹⁴ While seemingly harmless, these remarks trivialize racial discrimination and dismiss Black people's experiences, making it more difficult to address systemic racism.

Lack of disaggregated data

Black Canadians are an integral part of the country's social and economic fabric, yet they continue to face systemic barriers that hinder their full participation in society. While some progress has been made, persistent inequities remain.

A key strategy in addressing these challenges is collecting and analyzing disaggregated data, broken down into demographic subcategories. Without it, the unique experiences of Black Canadians are often obscured by broad racial classifications, limiting the effectiveness of policy responses.

Disaggregated data is crucial for identifying nuanced disparities within racialized communities. While many equity-deserving groups face economic and social barriers, the challenges experienced by Black Canadians are distinct and multifaceted. Factors such as birthplace, gender and age shape these experiences, making it essential to collect data that reflects this diversity.⁹⁵

With better demographic data, policymakers can take a more intersectional approach, ensuring that initiatives are tailored to the needs of different Black communities rather than applying one-size-fits-all solutions. For instance, a more nuanced picture shows that Black women generally face a higher prevalence of discrimination compared to Black men due to compounded barriers arising from the intersection of race and gender.⁹⁶ In addition, Black boys face increased challenges in K-12 educational environments compared to young Black girls

because of lower expectations from educators and increased disciplinary action in the form of suspensions or expulsions.^{97, 98}

In the economic sphere, disaggregated data helps pinpoint the most pronounced barriers, allowing for targeted policy interventions. Without it, setting measurable goals, tracking progress and holding institutions accountable for reducing racial disparities all become difficult.

The principle of what gets measured, gets done highlights the power of data-driven decision-making in dismantling systemic inequities. For example, young Black men are nearly twice as likely as non-Black young men to be outside of employment, education or training (NEET).⁹⁹ A better understanding of the underlying causes of this can inform tailored initiatives and supports to improve their labour market outcomes, which remain less favourable for Black men compared to the rest of the population over the past 15 years, even when controlling for factors such as education, age and immigrant status.¹⁰⁰

Historically, mainstream research has failed to prioritize disaggregated data, reinforcing Eurocentric norms and white privilege.^{101, 102} This lack of detailed analysis has contributed to a false sense of objectivity, masking the lived realities of Black Canadians. However, there is growing recognition of the need for inclusive research methodologies is shifting this trend. Ensuring access to high-quality, disaggregated data is a critical step in advancing equity, justice and meaningful social change.^{103, 104}

Education

Context

Education in Canada is the foundation of social mobility, providing individuals with opportunities for economic and professional advancement. Despite progress, Black students continue to face systemic barriers throughout their educational journey. Higher poverty rates among Black children and youth limit access to essential resources, while the education system lacks culturally responsive curriculum, teaching models and Black educators. Overt and subtle discrimination both remain prevalent, even in post-secondary institutions.^{105, 106} Additionally, the absence of culturally relevant pedagogy and diverse faculty representation hinders Black students' academic success and sense of belonging.¹⁰⁷ One of the biggest challenges to understanding the experiences of Black people with the education system in Canada is the lack of consistent disaggregated data.¹⁰⁸ Data on K-12 for example may be collected by individual school boards but there are few provincial or national studies that paint a complete picture. While some of the data exist – for example through standardized provincial testing – it is not shared. Similarly, most post-secondary institutions are not

subject to mandatory reporting on employee or student demographics, and many do not collect data specifically on Black people. The following section draws on published sources and explores the multifaceted landscape of Black students' experiences in the Canadian education system, from K-12 through to post-secondary levels, curriculum, examining current challenges, systemic issues, educational outcomes and initiatives and programs supporting academic prowess and career readiness among Black youth. Some of the data is not very current and despite a plethora of initiatives over the past few years it is difficult to assess impact and where progress is being made.

Canadian public education curriculum and system

A major challenge for Black students' success in school is lack of representation in teaching roles.¹⁰⁹ Overall data are hard to find although clearly progress is being made. However, even in the Greater Toronto Area which has the highest concentration of Black people in the country there are gaps. For instance, in the Halton District School Board where 3% of the population is Black, Black teachers are

1.9 per cent of all elementary-school teachers and 1.6 per cent of all high-school teachers. In the Peel District School Board, where 9% of the population is Black, Black teachers make up 7.1 per cent of teachers.¹¹⁰ In the Toronto District School Board, where 9% of the population is Black, a survey indicated Black staff made up 6 per cent of its workforce (notably only 28 per cent of school staff participated in the survey).¹¹¹

This lack of Black representation has a large effect on the educational outcomes of Black youth. It has been shown that providing Black students with a Black teacher can result in a 13% increase in participation in post-secondary education, while decreasing the probability of not finishing high school by 29%.¹¹²

Teachers' expectations of students play a significant role in their engagement.¹¹³ Black high school students are often dissuaded from university and pushed toward vocational training regardless of their grades.^{114, 115, 116, 117} According to a survey conducted across major Canadian cities, Black students consistently reported that their teachers' low expectations negatively affected their overall engagement.^{118, 119} According to the TDSB, nearly 39% of Black students were enrolled in applied stream courses, compared to 18% of other racialized students and only 16% of white students.^{120, 121} This significantly limits their access to post-secondary science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programs.¹²²



According to a survey conducted across major Canadian cities, Black students consistently reported that their teachers' low expectations negatively affected their overall engagement.

Academic streaming of Black students not only negatively affects their academic performance and career trajectories, but their self-perceptions, confidence and aspirations.^{123, 124} While 94% of Black youth between the ages of 15 and 25 express a desire to obtain a university degree — higher than the 82% of non-Black youth — only 60% believe they can achieve that goal, compared to 76% of non-Black youth.¹²⁵ This disparity is reflected in post-secondary application rates, with only 42% of Black students applying compared to 60% of non-Black students.¹²⁶

These barriers are further compounded for intersectional groups within the Black community. Educational disparities are particularly evident among Black Muslims in Canada, where 27.8% lack formal educational certification, compared to 20.1% of the general population. Gender disparities also persist, with 33.4% of Black Muslim women lacking qualifications, compared to 22.6% of Muslim men, increasing their vulnerability to socio-economic disadvantages.¹²⁷



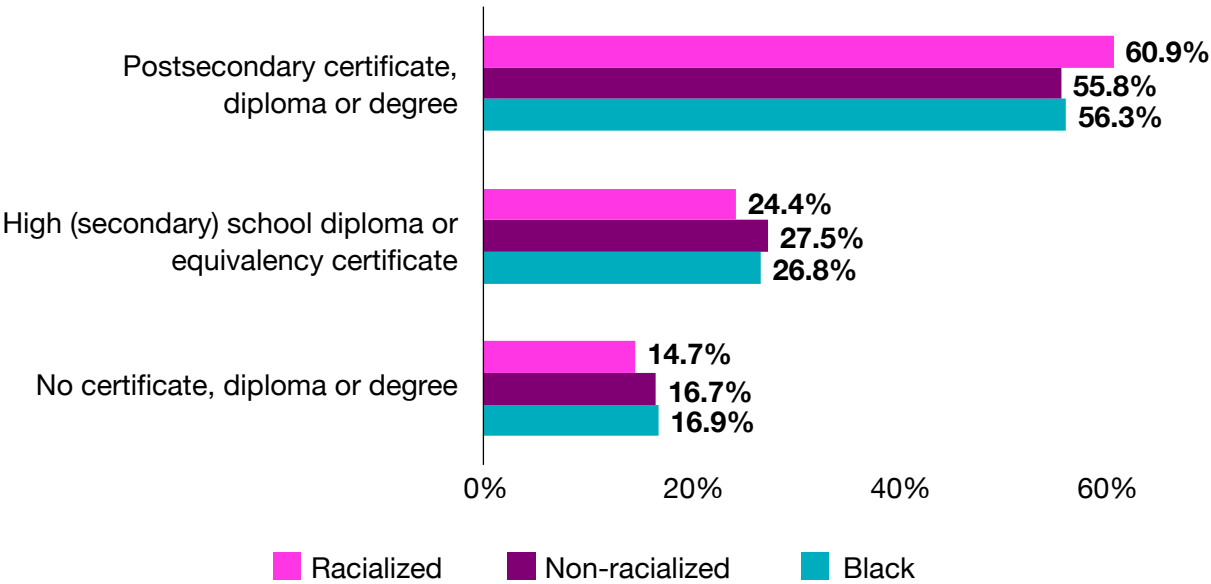
One significant gap in the Canadian education system is the absence of a comprehensive and inclusive curriculum. Black history, including slavery, anti-Black racism and the contributions of Black trailblazers, is often omitted or downplayed. This not only negatively affects the educational experience of Black students but also leaves gaps in the public's understanding of Canadian history and Black experiences.^{128, 129} In 2023, the Ontario Human Rights Commission acknowledged the persistent and systematic nature of anti-Black racism in public education in Ontario, calling for immediate action.¹³⁰

The exclusion of Black perspectives in the curriculum reinforces a Eurocentric educational model that alienates Black students, contributing to disengagement, lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates.¹³¹ According to 2017 data from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), 58% of Black students either drop out or do not have a known post-secondary destination.¹³² They also face higher rates of adversity and trauma, being exposed to community violence, racism and inequity.¹³³

The consequent normalization of anti-Black racism in the education system has precipitated disparities in disciplinary actions.¹³⁴ In North American elementary and high schools, Black students are more likely to be disciplined through suspension and expulsion than their peers.^{135, 136, 137} For example, in Toronto District School Board, Black students are twice more than twice as likely to be suspended compared to white

Figure 5

Highest level of education obtained by the Black population in Canada, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada. (2022). *Highest level of education by visible minority and immigrant status: Canada, provinces and territories, census divisions and census subdivisions with a population 5,000 or more*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810043201>

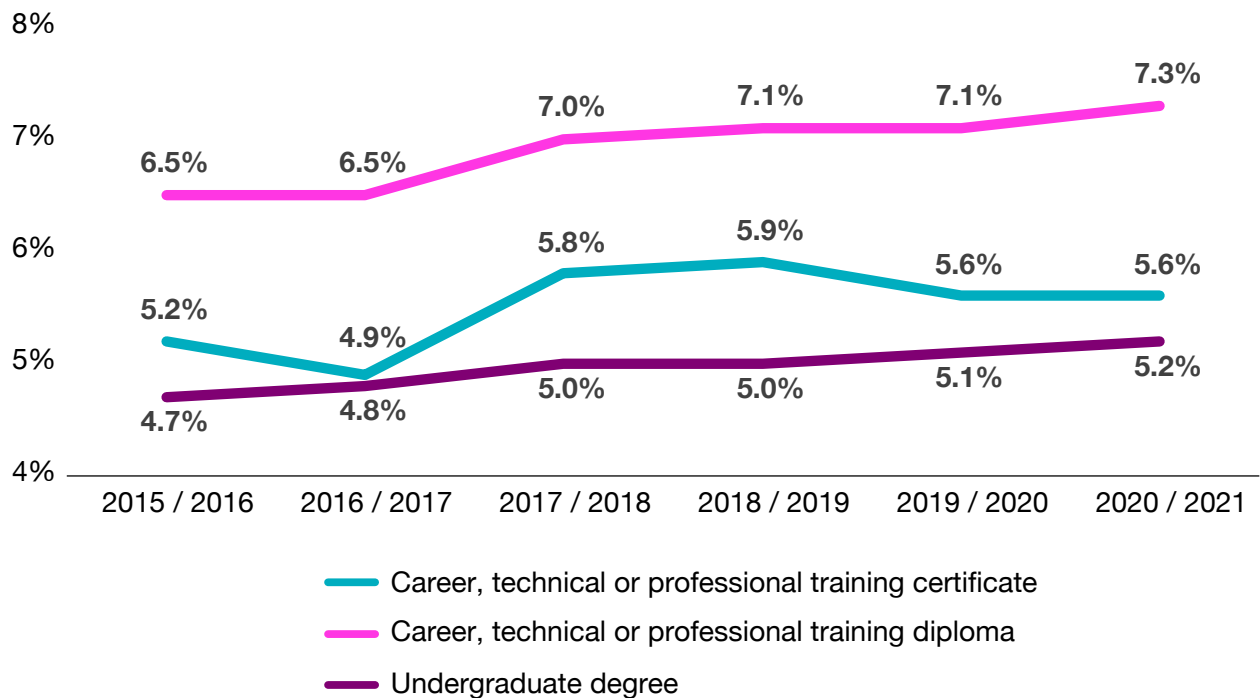
students, and the number of them being expelled was about four times more than their white peers.¹³⁸ These disparities are not solely due to behaviour, but are also rooted in biased treatment. This bias negatively affects mental health, academic confidence and long-term career prospects. Black boys are disproportionately subjected to biased disciplinary actions in schools due to harmful racial stereotypes that associate them with aggression or defiance. Social stigma of this form contributes to higher suspension and expulsion rates, impacting their educational outcomes, experiences and long-term opportunities, in addition to intersecting with oppressions of racism, ageism and classism.^{139, 140, 141}

Post-secondary education

Post-secondary education is a crucial driver of economic advancement, offering increased earning potential, career opportunities and social mobility. While Black Canadians now achieve university graduation rates comparable to the general population, they remain underrepresented in higher education (See Figures 5 and 6). Despite this progress, systemic barriers continue to hinder equitable access, retention and outcomes for Black students. The Black population in Canada is highly educated, with 56.3% holding a post-secondary credential in 2021, and this proportion continues to grow. (See Figure 5).

Figure 6

Proportion of Black students by entry cohort and educational qualification, Canada

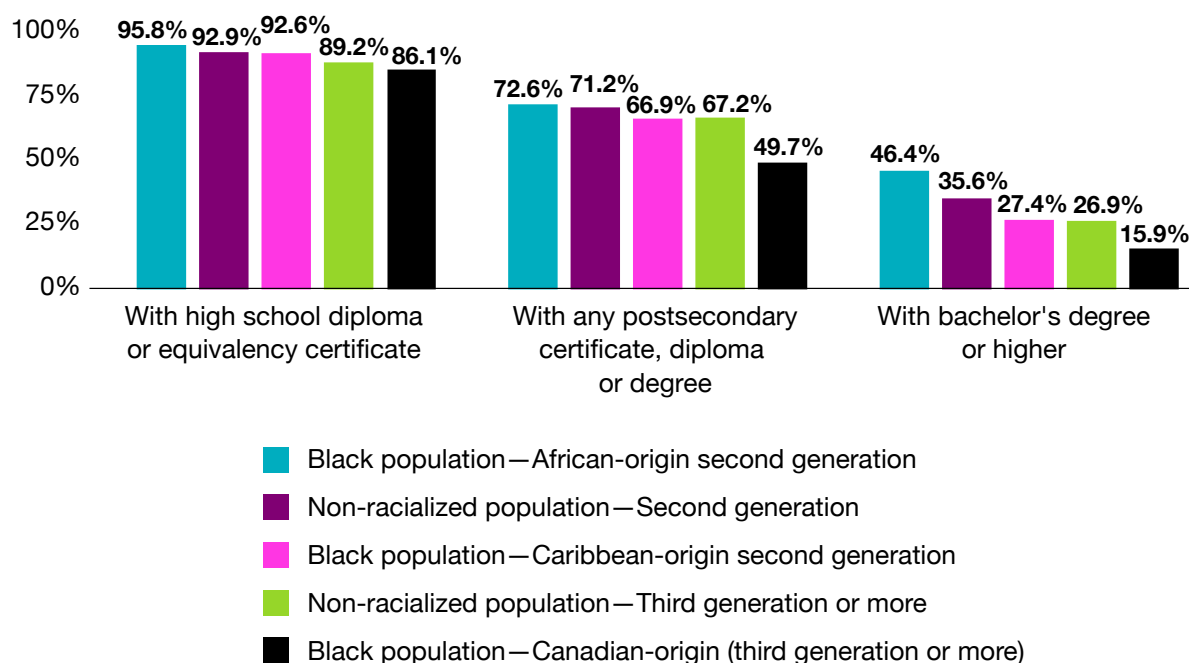


Source: Statistics Canada. (2023). *Canadian career, technical or professional training certificate students belonging to a visible minority group, by gender*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv!recreate.action?pid=3710024501&selecte dNodeIds=3D4&checkedLevels=0D1,1D1,3D1,4D1&refPeriods=20150101,20200101&dimensionLayouts=layout2,layout3 ,layout3,layout2,layout2,layout2&vectorDisplay=false>

While the attainment of professional training certificates has declined, undergraduate degree enrolment has seen a notable rise. (See Figure 6).

Figure 7

Educational characteristics of populations aged 25 to 54 in Canada, 2021



Source: Wall, K., & Wood, S. (2023). *Education and earnings of Canadian-born Black populations*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2023001/article/00009-eng.htm>

Disparities based on origin, gender and socio-economic background further shape their educational trajectories.¹⁴² For example, Black students of African origin have the highest university attainment rate (46%), largely due to the selection of highly educated immigrants through the point-based system.¹⁴³ In contrast, Canadian-born Black individuals (16%) attain degrees at lower rates than their Caribbean-origin counterparts (27%) and non-racialized, non-Indigenous Canadians (27%). Educational attainment also varies by both gender and immigration status. For example, 57% of Black women of African origin hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 12% of Black men of Canadian origin.¹⁴⁴

However, this difference is influenced by multiple factors, including Canada's point-based immigration system, which selects for highly educated individuals, in addition to gender-based disparities in education. These discrepancies underscore systemic failures in the Canadian education system and highlight the need for disaggregated data to inform policy interventions.

Beyond access to post-secondary education, Black students encounter challenges within these institutions, including racism and discrimination.^{145, 146, 147} Many Black students report feeling that educators do not treat them equitably, which affects their academic confidence, success and subsequent career opportunities.^{148, 149} These experiences of overt and subtle discrimination contribute to feelings of isolation and negatively affect academic performance.^{150, 151}



Studies also show that even when Black students pursue STEM fields, they are less likely to secure careers in the relevant industries.

Additionally, financial barriers create further obstacles, as many Black students come from low-income backgrounds and must take on student loans or part-time jobs, limiting their ability to focus fully on their studies and engage in enriching academic experiences.^{152, 153}

The persistent issue of disciplinary and occupational segregation also has long-term implications for Black students in accessing Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and career advancement.¹⁵⁴ The underrepresentation of Black individuals in STEM fields reflects and reinforces systemic barriers.¹⁵⁵ Studies also show that even when Black students pursue STEM fields, they are less likely to secure careers in the relevant industries.¹⁵⁶ This disparity reflects structural obstacles such as limited access to mentorship, biases in hiring processes and the lack of representation in leadership roles.

The underrepresentation of Black professionals in STEM is further compounded by the hierarchical nature of these careers, where advancement often depends on informal networks and gatekeeping practices that disadvantage. A prevailing belief that

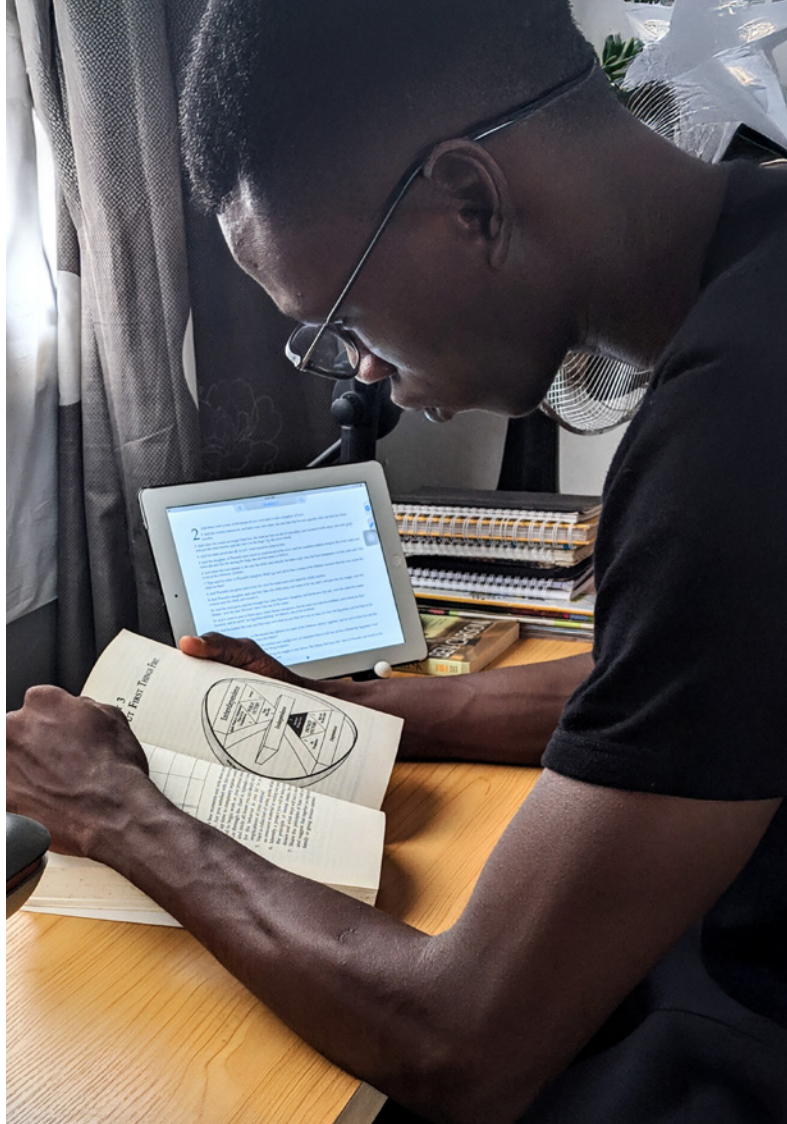
success in STEM fields depends on what's called natural talent also plays a role, as it aligns with anti-Black narratives that undervalue Black students' potential and contributions.¹⁵⁷ These systemic barriers manifest in employment outcomes, with Black workers in technology fields facing the lowest participation rates and earnings among racialized groups in Canada.¹⁵⁸

Mentorship is a crucial factor influencing Black student success in post-secondary education. Guidance from Black faculty members significantly supports academic achievement by helping students navigate academic challenges, build professional networks and access career opportunities.¹⁵⁹ However, the severe underrepresentation of Black faculty members, who make up only 1.9% of university faculty despite Black students accounting for 6% of university enrolments in 2021, limits mentorship opportunities.^{160, 161, 162} Without sufficient Black faculty representation, many Black students struggle to find role models who understand their unique experiences and challenges.

Limited mentorship and sponsorship further exacerbate difficulties faced by Black faculty members,¹⁶³ especially for Black women professors who face compounded barriers as a result of their intersectional identities.¹⁶⁴ Various studies exploring the experiences of Black women faculty members at several Canadian universities revealed that they face multiple and overlapping oppressions affecting their careers, complex power relations and discrimination,¹⁶⁵ isolation being

the only Black women or one of very few in faculty positions,¹⁶⁶ lower rates of tenure and promotion, and a significant earnings gap.¹⁶⁷ This leads to a pervasive inability to grow in these roles negatively impacting their career progression and potential funding and research opportunities. Furthermore, Black professors face systemic barriers, including lower salaries, heavier workloads and fewer promotions compared to their white colleagues.¹⁶⁸ These inequities restrict the number of Black faculty available to provide mentorship, further exacerbating educational disparities and limiting the guidance that is essential for Black student success.

The persistence of anti-Black racism in academia highlights broader systemic issues.¹⁶⁹ Black faculty members report experiencing racial slurs, verbal harassment, disdain from colleagues, microaggressions and even violent threats.^{170, 171, 172, 173} Institutional hiring and compliance processes continue to reflect biases, with Black faculty disproportionately absent from tenured positions and overburdened with diversity-related service expectations.^{174, 175, 176} Despite these realities, nearly one-half of Canadians believe that discrimination against Black individuals in education and broader society is no longer an issue. Meanwhile, 83% of Black Canadians report experiences of unfair treatment.¹⁷⁷



The challenges faced by Black students in post-secondary education extend into the job market. Despite achieving higher levels of education, Black university graduates are twice as likely to be employed in jobs requiring only a high school diploma or less.¹⁷⁸ Significant disparities persist in employment, leadership representation and earnings. Addressing these systemic barriers requires targeted interventions, such as mentorship programs, scholarships and anti-racism training for educators and policymakers. Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive race-based data collection among Canadian universities limits the ability to fully understand and address racial discrimination on campuses.¹⁷⁹

Initiatives and support programs

The educational challenges faced by Black students in Canada require systemic, multi-faceted interventions to address persistent inequities. These initiatives aim to dismantle systemic barriers, promote equitable opportunities and foster an inclusive educational environment that supports Black student success.

Race-based data collection and policy reform

A major challenge in addressing systemic discrimination in education is the lack of comprehensive race-based data collection. Without data, it is difficult to assess the full extent of racial disparities and measure the effectiveness of policy interventions. Mandating race-based data collection across Canadian universities and school boards would provide valuable insights into student outcomes, enabling evidence-based policy reforms to address racial inequities.¹⁸⁰ Continuing to support scholars focused on analyzing data and what works to advance educational achievement in the Black Community is also critical building on the seminal work of scholars like Dr. Carl James.

Improved representation of Black people at all levels

There is considerable evidence to support the notion that representation among teachers, principals, professors, academic leaders and staff is critical to promoting more inclusion

at both the K-12 and post-secondary levels. While progress is being made – we have seen growth not only in Black teachers and principals but in the number of Black university and college presidents, intentional strategies are required to attract, retain and promote Black talent in the education system. Some school boards and post-secondary institutions are tackling this head on with targeted hiring and “cluster” hires. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council has targeted programs to support Black researchers which is critical to their career trajectories. Programs focused upstream have targeted Black youth, training them to be tutors, in an effort to provide better support for Black students but also to help pave a path to a new generation of teachers.

Integrated strategies at the board and institutional level

Many school boards and individual institutions have developed and implemented strategies to address anti-Black racism and advance opportunities for Black Students. While early days, the Centre for Excellence for Black Achievement the Toronto District School Board is a good example of an effort to drive change.

Culturally responsive curriculum

A fundamental gap in the Canadian education system is the absence of Black perspectives in the curriculum. To address this, integrating Afrocentric perspectives into K-12 education is essential. A culturally responsive curriculum would ensure that Black history — including slavery, systemic anti-Black racism and

the contributions of Black trailblazers — is accurately represented. Moving beyond tokenistic cultural recognition, this can improve student engagement, retention and academic performance by fostering a sense of belonging and representation in education.¹⁸¹ Starting in September 2025, Black history will become a mandatory part of the curriculum for Grades 7, 8 and 10 in Ontario public schools.¹⁸²

Anti-racism training for educators

The normalization of anti-Black racism in the education system contributes to disparities in disciplinary actions and streaming. Implementing mandatory anti-racism training for educators can help dismantle systemic biases by increasing awareness of historical injustices, implicit biases and the impact of discrimination on Black students. These programs would also equip educators with strategies to foster inclusive classroom environments and ensure accountability in addressing racism in schools. The province of British Columbia launched the K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan in 2023 to empower and inform educators and students to identify and take action against racism and discrimination in B.C. schools.¹⁸³ McMaster University's Anti-Black Racism and Critical Race Education Program covers essential anti-racism concepts and their real-world implications. Participants have reported increased awareness of the biases and systemic challenges faced by Black Canadians.¹⁸⁴

Mentorship and tutoring networks

Academic streaming and lower expectations for Black students limit their educational and career prospects. Studies show that programs connecting Black students with Black mentors significantly improve graduation and employment rates.¹⁸⁵ Establishing mentorship and tutoring networks can help counteract this by pairing Black students with professionals and academics who serve as role models. These networks can provide critical academic support, build confidence and help students navigate barriers in education and career advancement.

STEM access programs

Black students, particularly Black girls and women, remain underrepresented in STEM fields. This is due to systemic barriers, limited access to advanced courses and implicit biases. Expanding STEM-focused initiatives can encourage Black students to pursue careers in STEM fields by providing mentorship, financial support and hands-on learning opportunities. Targeted recruitment efforts and scholarship programs in STEM can also help bridge this gap.

Youth employment bridging programs

Transitioning from education to employment remains a challenge for many Black students due to systemic discrimination and limited industry connections. Implementing youth employment bridging programs can create pathways from education to career success by offering internships, co-op placements

and networking opportunities with industry leaders. Strengthening partnerships between educational institutions and businesses can help Black students gain meaningful work experience and access to leadership roles.

Targeted scholarships and financial support

Financial barriers disproportionately affect Black students, limiting access to higher education and increasing the need for student loans or part-time work. Expanding targeted scholarships and financial aid programs for Black students can reduce financial strain, increase university application rates and support long-term academic success. Scholarships tied to academic achievement, leadership and STEM fields can create equitable pathways for Black students pursuing post-secondary education. For example, Environment and Climate Change Canada delivers the Science Horizons Youth Internship Program to encourage employers to create jobs for youth by supporting up to 70% of wage costs for post-secondary STEM graduates.

Digital equity initiatives

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted a digital divide that disproportionately affected Black students, who faced limited access to Internet services, technology and educational support. To address this gap, initiatives should focus on providing free or subsidized Internet access, technology grants and digital literacy programs to ensure Black students can fully participate in online and hybrid learning environments.



Addressing systemic barriers in education requires intentional, data-driven and culturally responsive initiatives. By implementing mentorship programs, anti-racism training, targeted financial aid and inclusive curricula, Canada can create an education system that fosters equitable opportunities for Black students.

For example, NPower Canada, a non-profit organization, offers countrywide programs to develop the information technology (IT) skills of youth. They have helped more than 1,600 graduates launch their own digital career with Fortune 500 companies.

Addressing systemic barriers in education requires intentional, data-driven and culturally responsive initiatives. By implementing mentorship programs, anti-racism training, targeted financial aid and inclusive curricula, Canada can create an education system that fosters equitable opportunities for Black students. These efforts must be reinforced through policy reforms, industry partnerships and accountability measures to ensure sustained progress in dismantling anti-Black racism in education.

Employment



Context

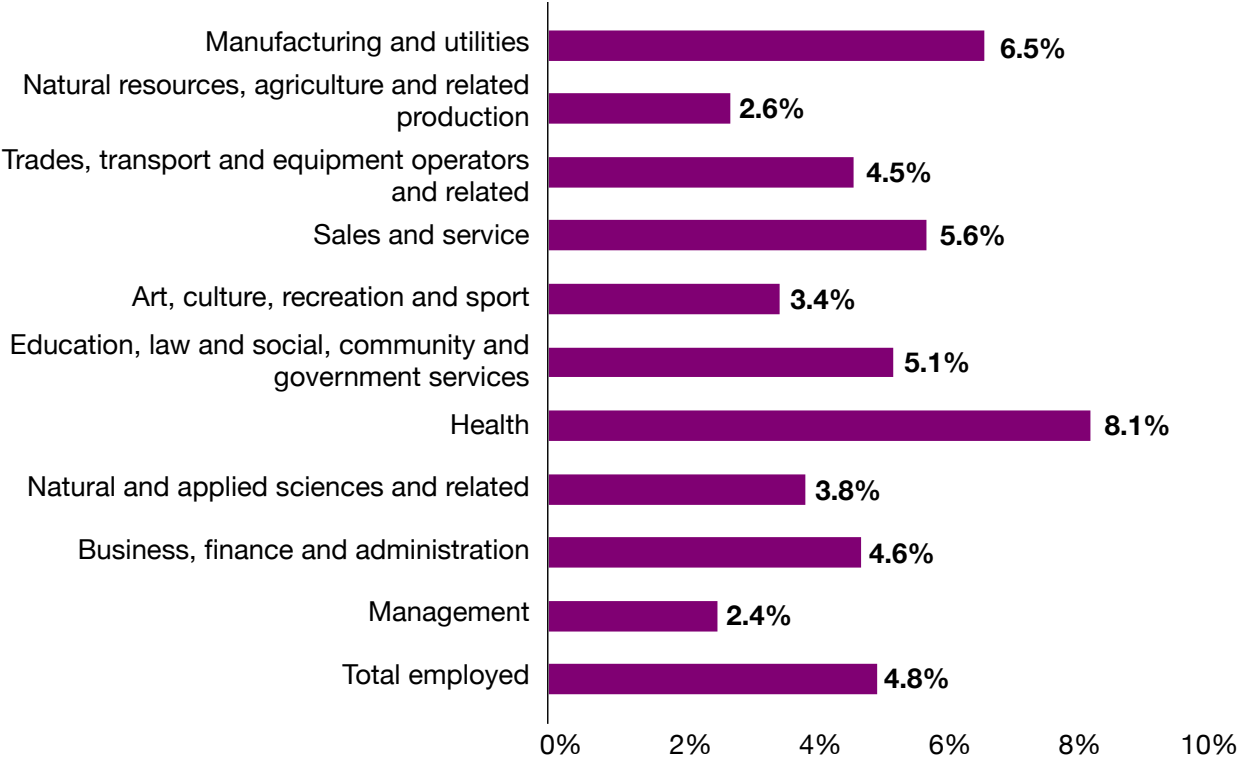
The employment landscape for Black people in Canada presents a complex tapestry of opportunities, challenges and ongoing inequities. This section delves into the aspects of Black employment experiences, shedding light on the various pathways to employment and the persistent challenges that many Black individuals face along the way. It examines how these challenges, both historical and new, affect socioeconomic outcomes and reinforce disparities. The impact of pervasive workplace discrimination and its intersectional dimensions, particularly at the crossroads of race and gender, poses an increased exacerbation of obstacles impeding career progression and aspirations. Oftentimes carrying mental health implications for Black employees who navigate these challenging environments. Looking forward, this section offers insights into the perspectives of Black jobseekers and employees who have faced discrimination in light of adversity and presents certain types of programs and initiatives that can foster a more equitable employment landscape for Black individuals.

Pathways to employment

Black Canadians continue to face challenges in the labour market, experiencing higher unemployment rates and lower representation in well-paying positions.¹⁸⁶ The Black population has an unemployment rate that is almost double that of the overall population (10.3% vs 5.7% in Jan 2024 and 11.8% vs 6.7% in Jan 2025). Despite this, the participation rate of the Black population is much higher (74.2% vs 64.8%), meaning they are actively engaged in the labour force.¹⁸⁷

Breaking down employment by age groups, the unemployment rate of Black workers between the ages of 25 to 54 was 10.9% in January 2025, up from 8.9% a year earlier. In contrast, the January 2025 unemployment rate for all Canadians in this age range was only 5.7%, up from just 4.9% a year earlier.¹⁸⁸ The disparity becomes even starker when comparing non-racialized Canadians, whose unemployment rate increased only slightly, from 4.1% to 4.4% over that time. Youth employment statistics further emphasize these inequalities. The unemployment rate among Black youth is nearly double that of their non-racialized peers, 18.6% compared to 10.8%.¹⁸⁹

Figure 8
Employment characteristics by industry occupations, 2024



Source: Statistics Canada. (2025). *Table 14-10-0438-01 Employment characteristics by visible minority group, annual*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1410043801>

Furthermore, research indicates an overrepresentation of Black workers in temporary, lower-paying jobs and an underrepresentation in managerial roles.^{190, 191} Racial discrimination, biased hiring practices, employer hostility, negative treatment and racial stereotyping continue to hinder access to employment and career advancement, reinforcing economic disparities.¹⁹²

Figure 8 shows the employment characteristics by industry of Black people. Black workers make up 4.8% of total employment, but their representation varies across industries. They are most concentrated in health occupations (8.1%), followed by manufacturing and utilities (6.5%) and sales and service (5.6%). Representation

is also slightly above average in education, law, social, community and government services (5.1%) and business, finance and administration (4.6%). However, Black workers are significantly underrepresented in management (2.4%), natural resources, agriculture and related production (2.6%) and natural and applied sciences (3.8%), indicating barriers to leadership roles, STEM fields and primary industries. Their presence in arts, culture, recreation and sport (3.4%) is also below their overall employment share. The lower participation of Black Canadians in certain industries, such as agriculture and manufacturing, may be influenced by historical associations with forced labor, as well as access and structural barriers. STEM



fields continue to have low Black participation, not just due to education gaps but a lack of representation and mentorship, as well as institutional biases. Expanding diversity initiatives and access to early STEM exposure is critical for addressing these disparities. Future research should explore how cultural attitudes toward specific occupations shape employment trends in addition to economic factors. These disparities highlight structural challenges in accessing certain high-paying or leadership roles while highlighting areas of greater representation, particularly in health and service-oriented occupations.

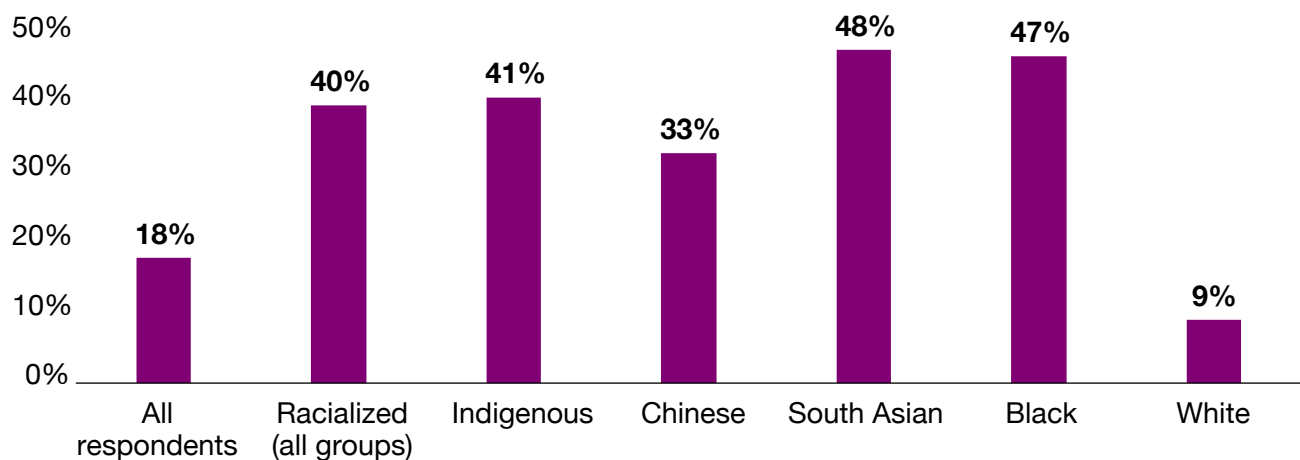
These persistent inequities highlight the structural challenges within Canada's labour market. Without addressing these systemic issues, Black Canadians will continue to experience barriers to economic stability and career growth, underscoring the need for policies aimed at fostering equity in employment opportunities and representation.

Black men, regardless of age or parental birth origin, earn less than their non-racialized counterparts, as Figure 2 shows.¹⁹³ The earnings gap becomes even more pronounced among university-educated professionals. In 2020, non-racialized individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher had a median income of \$70,000, compared to just \$50,000 for Black individuals.¹⁹⁴ This means Black Canadians earn only 75.6 cents for every dollar earned by non-racialized workers.

Furthermore, occupational segregation plays a role in exacerbating these disparities, as Black people are disproportionately employed in sectors with lower wages and limited upward mobility.

Figure 9

Race- or ethnicity-based discrimination by racial or ethnic group and Indigenous Peoples, Canada, 2020–2023



Source: Cukier, W., Parkin, A., Saiphoo, A., Borova, B., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Gender, diversity and discrimination in the workplace*. Diversity Institute. <https://www.torontomu.ca/diversity/reports/gender-diversity-and-discrimination-in-the-workplace/>

For example, Black women tend to be concentrated in the healthcare and social assistance sectors but face difficulties accessing higher positions like doctors, nurses and surgeons.¹⁹⁵ Black employees also experience challenges in the workplace such as barriers to career advancement and getting promotions, which negatively impacts their mental health and confidence.^{196, 197, 198, 199}

Experiences of discrimination in the workplace

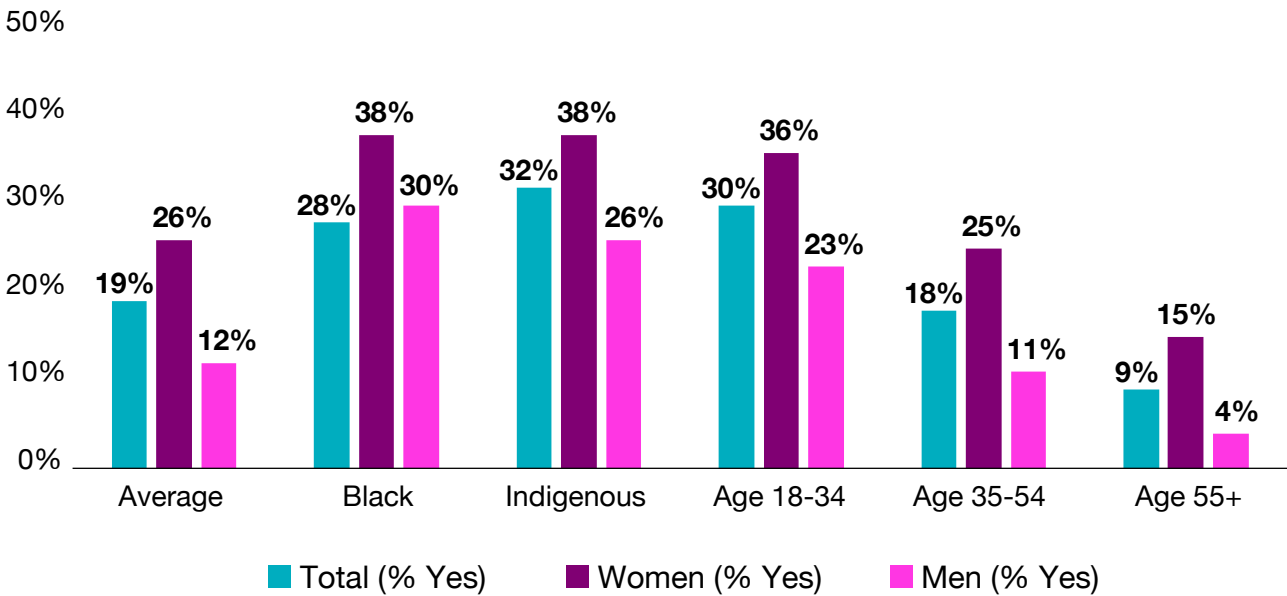
Workplace discrimination remains a persistent issue for Black Canadians. It manifests itself in hiring practices, daily work experiences and opportunities for promotion.²⁰⁰ Many Black Canadians perceive the workplace as an epicentre of racism and discrimination.²⁰¹

The Environics Institute, in collaboration with the Future Skills Centre and Diversity Institute, conducted a comprehensive study

to understand the experiences of working-age Canadians in the workplace. Since 2020, the researchers carried out seven waves of surveys, each gathering responses from more than 5,000 individuals. Four of these survey waves included questions about workplace discrimination, focusing on whether respondents had experienced unfair treatment due to their race or ethnicity.

The findings revealed significant disparities in workplace experiences among racialized groups (Figure 9). Approximately two in five (40%) racialized participants reported experiencing race-based discrimination at work. The issue was pronounced among Black respondents, nearly one-half (47%) of whom indicated that they had faced discrimination or unfair treatment in the workplace. In contrast, only 9% of white survey participants reported experiencing workplace discrimination due to their race or ethnicity.²⁰²

Figure 10
Gender-based discrimination by demographic group (Survey Waves 2 and 5)

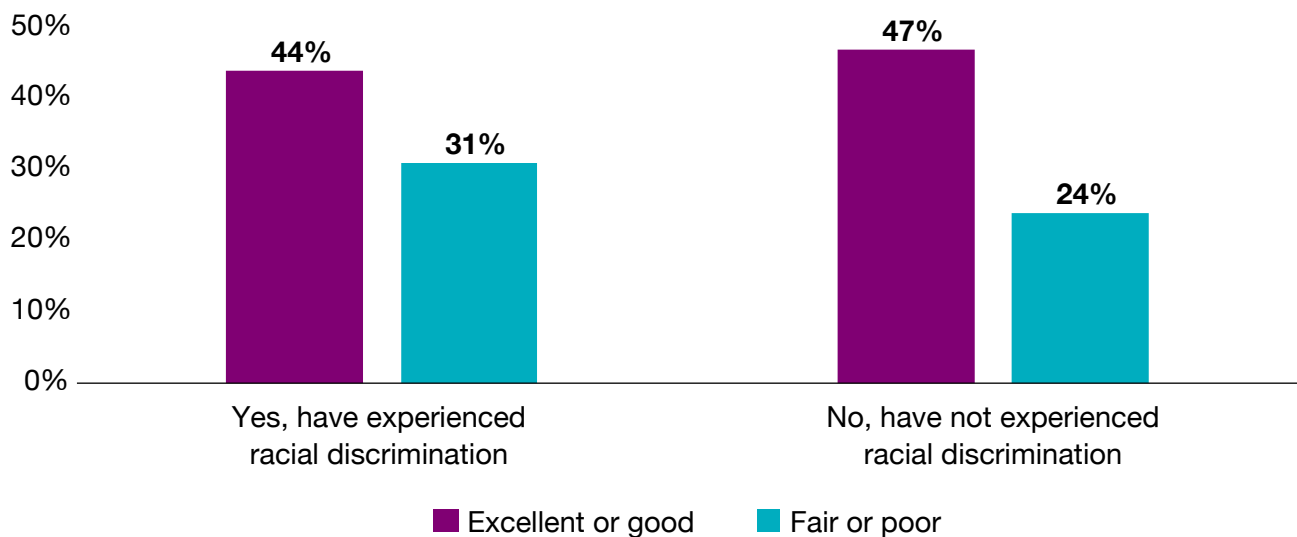


Source: Cukier, W., Parkin, A., Saiphoo, A., Borova, B., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Gender, diversity and discrimination in the workplace*. Diversity Institute. <https://www.torontomu.ca/diversity/reports/gender-diversity-and-discrimination-in-the-workplace/>

A gender analysis among Black participants showed that men (50%) were more likely than women (45%) to report race-based discrimination (Figure 10). Meanwhile, Black and Indigenous women reported higher rates of gender-based discrimination (38%) than women overall (26%). Among all age groups and genders surveyed, Black and Indigenous women faced the highest levels of gender-based discrimination.

Figure 11

Mental health of Black respondents by experiences of workplace discrimination based on racial or ethnic identity



Source: Cukier, W., Parkin, A., Saiphoo, A., Borova, B., & Edwards, M. (2024). *Gender, diversity and discrimination in the workplace*. Diversity Institute. <https://www.torontomu.ca/diversity/reports/gender-diversity-and-discrimination-in-the-workplace/>

The study also established a strong correlation between workplace discrimination and poor mental health among employed respondents. Experiences of anti-Black racism in Canadian workplaces were linked to a range of negative outcomes, including loss of professional status, decreased motivation, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse. The cumulative effects of persistent racism, combined with barriers to employment and career advancement, had a detrimental impact on Black employees' mental health and self-confidence.^{203, 204, 205, 206}

Among Black respondents, those who reported experiencing workplace discrimination were more likely to describe their mental health as fair or poor compared to those who had not faced discrimination but still reported similar mental health concerns (Figure 11).

A 2024 Statistics Canada report provided further insight into the experiences of workplace discrimination among working-age Canadians. By analyzing pooled data from six waves of the Canadian Social Survey, the report examined discrimination trends from 2021 to 2024. It found that just over one-half (51%) of racialized individuals aged 15 and older reported experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment within the past five years, nearly double the proportion recorded for non-racialized individuals (27%).²⁰⁷

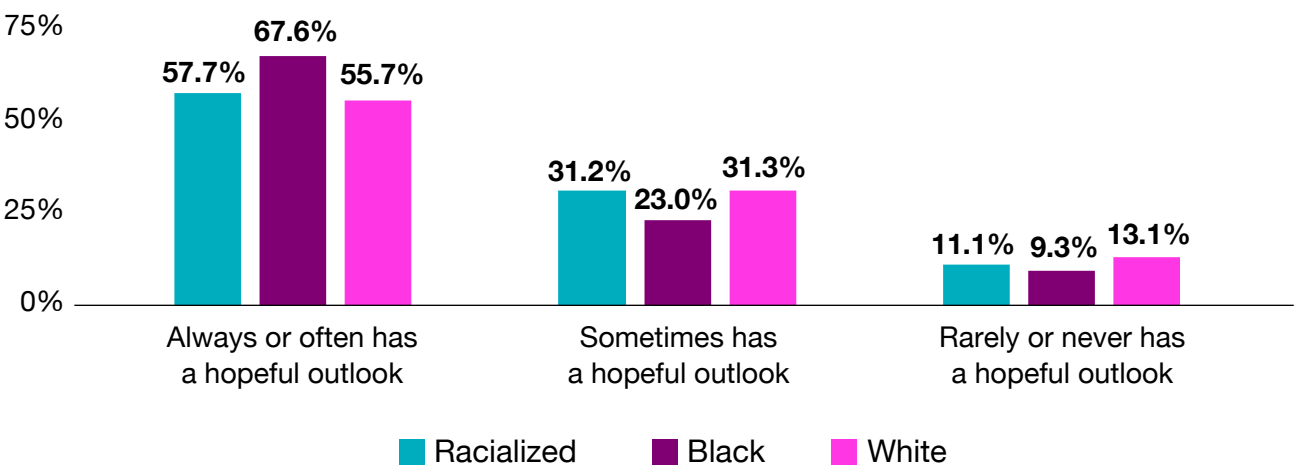
Among Black respondents, Canadian-born individuals were significantly more likely to report having experienced discrimination (71%) than either recent (51%) or established (59%) Black immigrants. The workplace emerged as the most common site of discrimination, with 41% of racialized

individuals reporting workplace discrimination or unfair treatment. Nearly one-half (48%) of Black respondents indicated experiencing discrimination in a workplace setting, a higher proportion than 39% of other racialized respondents and 41% of non-racialized respondents.^{208, 209}

The study also highlighted how Black Canadians often felt that their social-emotional skills, such as adaptability, critical thinking, active listening and teamwork, were undervalued by employers.²¹⁰ Rather than being assessed based on merit, Black employees reported that their social-emotional skills were often judged through the lens of racial stereotypes, which created significant barriers to career advancement and promotion.²¹¹ These experiences contributed to the perception that workplace racial discrimination remained a serious problem for Black Canadians at higher rates than for other racialized and white individuals.²¹² Additionally, a 2024 survey conducted by KPMG found that while more than four in five (83%) Black Canadians had observed progress in workplace equity and inclusion efforts since 2023, nearly the same proportion (81%) reported experiencing racism or microaggressions in the workplace during the same period.²¹³ These findings underscored the necessity of sustained efforts to combat workplace discrimination.



Figure 12
Future outlook by demographic group, 2024



Source: Statistics Canada. (2025). *Table 13-10-0848-01 Future outlook by gender and other selected sociodemographic characteristics*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1310084801>

Addressing workplace discrimination against Black employees requires a multi-faceted approach centered on equity, inclusion and accountability. Recommended strategies include anti-racism training, recruitment practices designed to minimize bias, the establishment of diversity and inclusion committees, regular employee surveys to assess workplace culture, measurable diversity goals at all organizational levels, employee resource groups and pay equity audits. By implementing these measures, organizations can foster a more equitable and supportive work environment for Black employees while actively working to dismantle systemic discrimination.

Despite all the discrimination and embedded racism they face, Black Canadians have a much more positive outlook for the future than racialized and white individuals, with 67.6% reporting they “always or often” have a hopeful outlook, versus 57.7% for racialized and 55.7% for white respondents (Figure 12).²¹⁴

Studies in the public sector have highlighted ongoing problems despite strategies to address anti-Black racism. A report by the Privy Council Office revealed high levels of discrimination reported by Black and racialized employees, with two-thirds of Black workers (67%) leaving their positions within six months.²¹⁵ According to the internal report, employees reported numerous instances of racial stereotyping, microaggressions and verbal abuse. Many stated that these experiences had negatively affected their mental health, eroded trust in the Privy Council Office and discouraged them from participating in the employer’s EDI initiatives.

There is currently a class-action lawsuit representing more than 45,000 Black public-sector employees who have been denied promotions, hostile work environments and underrepresentation in senior roles as evidence of systemic discrimination.²¹⁶

Meanwhile, the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC), which is responsible for investigating human rights complaints, is facing its own crisis over allegations of internal anti-Black racism, sexism and discrimination.²¹⁷ A Senate committee study warned of a “crisis of confidence” in Canada’s human rights system following these revelations. Data from CHRC revealed that in 2018, only 6% of race-based complaints were deemed credible enough to proceed to tribunal, raising questions about the CHRC’s ability to handle cases fairly and without prejudice.²¹⁸

Although the Employment Equity Act and other legislation provide protections, the “visible minority” category covering all racialized people including Black Canadians conceals important within group differences and fails to adequately address the unique forms of racism faced by Black workers.²¹⁹ Recently, a task force chair commissioned to review the Employment Equity proposed adding two new designated groups – Black people and the 2SLGBTQ+ community – given their unique experiences.²²⁰ The review also reinforced the importance of disaggregated data.²²¹

Initiatives and support programs

Despite progress, Black Canadians continue to face systemic barriers that limit their access to meaningful employment and career advancement. To close these gaps, culturally responsive and targeted interventions are necessary to dismantle barriers, create equitable employment pathways and fully leverage Black talent in Canada. Prioritizing effective programs that combine skills training and systemic reforms, such as anti-racist policy frameworks and employer accountability measures, can provide pathways to employment. Collaborative partnerships between employers, government and intermediaries matching skills training with tangible employment opportunities creates benefits for jobseekers and employers alike.

Legislation, codes and policies serve as essential tools in dismantling systemic racism and mitigating the economic challenges faced by Black Canadians by establishing enforceable measures that promote equity and fair access to opportunities. Employment equity policies are crucial for ensuring fair hiring practices, career advancement and wage parity for Black Canadians. The *Employment Equity Act*, which mandates federally regulated companies to track and report on the inclusion of designated groups, has made strides in promoting workforce diversity. However, its broad categorization of “racialized people” does not specifically address the unique economic barriers faced by Black Canadians.^{222, 223}

The Diversity Assessment Tool's six key dimensions of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) performance



Governance,
leadership
and strategy



Human
resource
processes



Values
and
culture



Measurement
and tracking
of EDI



Diversity
across the
value chain



Outreach
and
expanding
the pool

In 2021, the Government of Canada initiated a review of the *Employment Equity Act*, leading to recommendations for designating Black Canadians as a separate group to better address systemic inequities in employment.²²⁴ While the legislation applies only the federally regulated corporations (although other instruments have been proposed to broaden mandatory reporting, recognizing Black Canadians as a distinct group under the Act will enable more targeted policies.

Given that migrants compose nearly 60% of Black Canadians, immigration policies and programs, particularly those focused on pathways to employment, must consider the specific needs of the Black population. The high cost of child care in Canada has created significant barriers, forcing many families, including Black families, to rely on unstable or low-quality arrangements or even exit the workforce entirely.²²⁵ By increasing access to affordable and high-quality child care, more Black parents can enter the workforce, pursue career advancement and achieve greater financial stability, reinforcing the broader goal of economic inclusion and equity.

Promoting Black economic advancement in Canada requires a comprehensive and structured approach. A strong foundation begins with **governance, leadership and strategy**, where organizations must embed EDI principles into their decision-making structures. DI's Diversity Assessment Tools (DAT), which has been used to conduct EDI analysis across over 170 major public and private organizations, support organizations in developing comprehensive EDI strategies by identifying barriers across their functions. Additionally, organizations should set clear, measurable targets for Black representation in leadership roles and hold executives accountable for progress. Leadership commitment is crucial in ensuring that EDI goals translate into action. Voluntary codes and initiatives like the 50-30 Challenge, the 30% Club and the BNI exemplify how structured frameworks can drive representation in senior management and board positions. Furthermore, fully integrating Black professionals into leadership structures requires dedicated pathways for mentorship, collaboration and partnership-building to increase their access to leadership roles.

Inclusive human resource processes are essential for attracting and retaining Black talent. Organizations should implement unbiased hiring and promotion policies, ensuring that Black candidates have equitable access to job opportunities. This includes developing inclusive job descriptions, utilizing diverse recruitment channels and training selection panels to eliminate bias. Beyond hiring, organizations must invest in workforce development through mentorship programs, leadership training and WIL opportunities such as internships and co-op placements. However, research shows that Black Canadians do not benefit from WIL to the same extent due to workplace discrimination and cultural competency gaps. To mitigate this, organizations must tailor career development programs specifically for Black employees and collaborate with Black-led community organizations to create barrier-free access to meaningful employment. Additionally, organizations should partner with service providers, industry groups and Black-led advocacy organizations to bridge networking gaps and improve access to employment services.

The values and culture of an organization shape its long-term commitment to inclusion and belonging. Companies must cultivate a safe and supportive working environment by conducting anti-Black racism and cultural competency training, implementing anti-discrimination policies and fostering inclusive leadership. Additionally, organizations should actively celebrate Black cultural events and highlight Black success stories, ensuring that Black employees feel valued and represented.

Measuring and tracking progress is crucial. Organizations should systematically collect disaggregated data to track employee demographics, hiring trends, retention rates and promotion pathways. Without this, it is difficult to fully understand and address Black employees' unique challenges. Regular reporting and evaluation frameworks can help organizations measure their impact and refine strategies accordingly. Research has underscored a need for robust data collection and reporting mechanisms to drive meaningful progress. However, many employment programs suffer from limited engagement with employers and industry partners, partly because government funding prioritizes broad-reaching programs over targeted, high-impact initiatives. To overcome this, companies must integrate evaluation frameworks that measure outreach, recruitment, skills matching and training outcomes to optimize program design and effectiveness.

Promoting diversity across the value chain extends beyond hiring and into external partnerships and business practices. Organizations should implement supplier diversity policies prioritizing Black-owned businesses and ensuring that marketing and branding efforts accurately represent Black communities. Black entrepreneurship is a crucial component of economic advancement, and organizations can support Black-owned startups and SMEs through mentorship, funding and procurement opportunities.



Finally, outreach and expanding the pool are critical for building a sustainable pipeline of Black talent. Organizations should partner with educational institutions, community organizations and advocacy groups to provide targeted training programs, internships and career pathways for Black students and job seekers. WIL programs directly connecting Black students with employment opportunities have improved hiring rates and career success. However, a lack of employer engagement and industry partnerships remains a major barrier to expanding these opportunities. Organizations must intentionally partner with Black-led organizations and industry intermediaries that specialize in matching skills training with employment opportunities.

Building Skills and Capacity

Targeted programs to strengthen pathways to employment are critical and ensure that Black job seekers and employees have the skills they need to succeed are critical.

> **Networking and job placement hubs:**

Counteract the reliance on informal networks (85% of jobs are filled this way) by connecting Black job seekers with employers through dedicated intermediaries, such as Newcomer Entrepreneurship Hub (NEH), which offer networking opportunities for Black entrepreneurs who are new immigrants to Canada.²²⁶

> **Sector-specific bridging programs and skills transference:**

Provide talent pipelines for Black individuals with educational and/or professional experience as well as skills and credentials transference for individuals with foreign experience, such as programs offered by Acces Employment.²²⁷

> **Mentorship programs:**

Enhances labour market progression and integration by expanding networks, refining job search skills and fostering confidence through role models, such as Canadian Black Nurses Alliance's program which aims to support internationally students.²²⁸

> **Digital literacy workshops:**

Focus on developing novice, intermediate and advanced software skills training to align with employer demands in an increasingly digital economy and tech-driven sectors, such as AdaPT, which offer networking opportunities in the digital skills training program designed for Black youth.²²⁹

> **Wage subsidy programs:**

Incentivize employers by offsetting initial training costs for Black job seekers, enabling more job experience and networking opportunities.²³⁰

> **Work integrated learning (WIL):**

Offering field placements, internships, apprenticeships and optional co-operative placements to address skills mismatches and prioritize sectors with high Black under-employment (such as health care, engineering and technology), as well as fields and disciplines where Black individuals are more representative.²³¹

But the focus cannot be on “fixing” the job seekers – its critically important to also focus training efforts on building inclusive workplaces and to shaping the knowledge, skills of behaviours of all employees particularly those in decision making roles. Furthermore, it is important to demonstrate how the training resulted in changes by establishing tracking and measurement in order to evaluate impacts and positive outcomes. This leads to greater accountability and enables optimization of programs and initiatives by assessing what works. While training is not a panacea and needs to be combined with structural, policy and process changes, anti-Black racism training is an important piece of the puzzle.

Leadership



Context

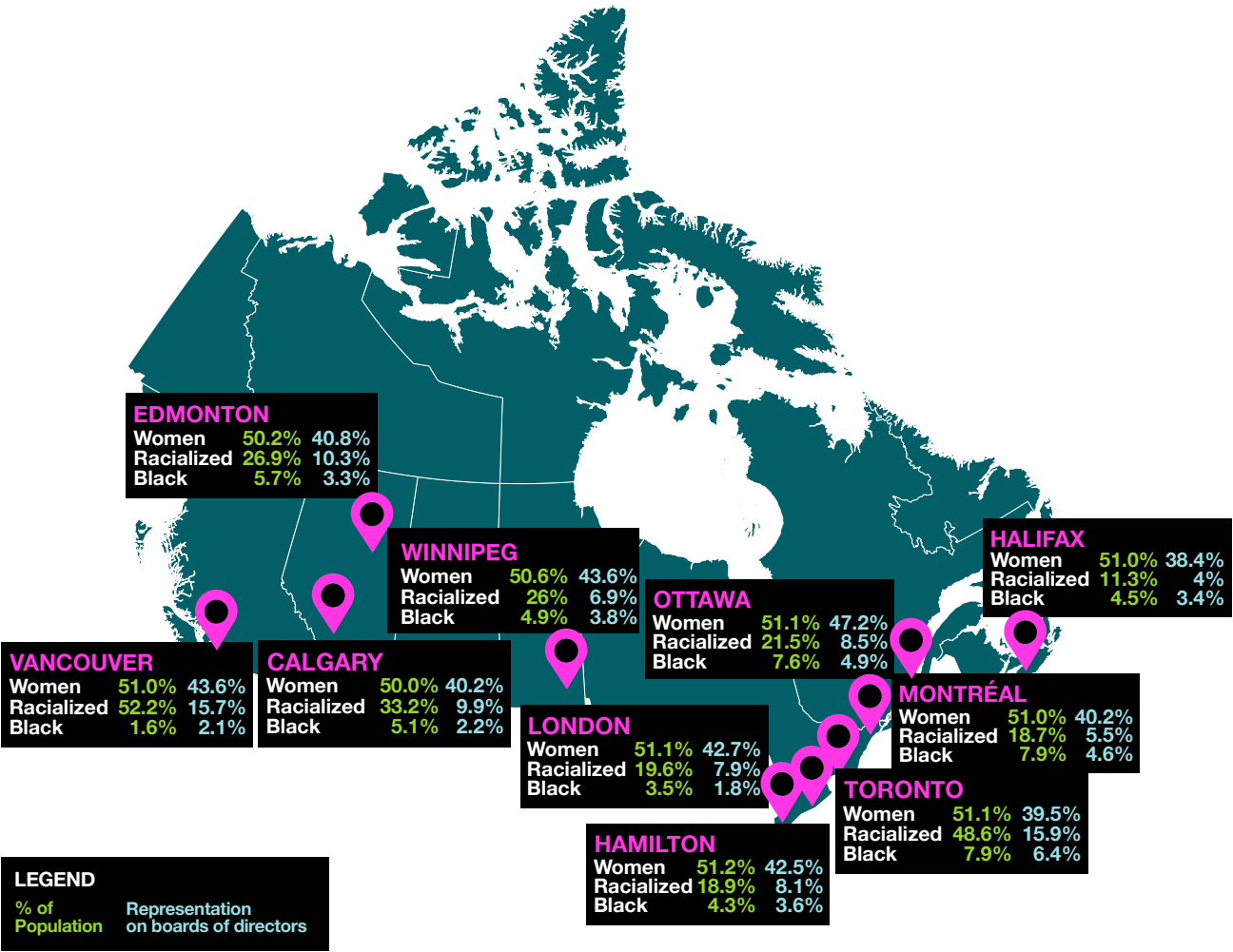
Diverse leadership enhances organizational performance and fosters innovation. It helps mitigate legal and reputational risks, while driving better organizational outcomes. It also signals who belongs, challenges systemic barriers and workplace discrimination.

Diverse leadership also signals who belongs and shapes the aspirations of others. Black leaders have made progress in some sectors more than others. For many years, they have been prominent in advocacy and nonprofit roles. For example, among elected officials we see more and more Black people. At the federal level, 5.4 % of Cabinet ministers identify as Black, and we have the first Black speaker of the house.

Similarly, in the judiciary we have seen significant efforts to increase the representation of Black judges. In broadcast media, we see more and more Black hosts – and these shifts have a profound impact on the assumptions of who can be a leader and so the aspirations of Black people to be leaders. However, the representation of Black people among executive decision makers and on boards of directors across sectors, while improving, has some distance to go.

The following section provides an analysis of leadership data across executive and board positions for the Black population, pathways to ameliorate the leadership pipeline to increase opportunities and initiatives and policy responses that can help dismantle barriers.

Figure 13
Representation on boards of directors in 10 Canadian cities



Source: Gagnon, A., Cukier, W., Oliver, A., & Mo, G. Y. (2024). *DiversityLeads. Diverse representation in leadership: A review of 10 Canadian cities*. Diversity Institute. <https://www.torontomu.ca/content/dam/diversity/reports/diversityleads2024/DI-FS%20Diverse%20Representation%20in%20Leadership%20%E2%80%93%20Aug2024-final.pdf>

Executive and board leadership roles

A Diversity Institute study of leadership representation across Canada’s largest cities further underscores this issue. While Black people make up 4.2% of the national population, they account for only 3.8% of board members and 2.6% of senior managers across sectors.²³² However, some

exceptions appeared in police department and university governing boards, where Black representation surpassed their population share (6.3% and 6.2%, respectively). Additionally, Black professionals held 9.5% of senior management roles in school boards, exceeding the representation of other racialized groups in similar positions (8.4%).²³³

Table 1**Representation of Black leaders, S&P/TSX Composite Index**

| S&P Composite Index | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Number of Companies | 222 | 241 | 235 |
| % of Black Leaders on Boards | 0.9% | 1.5% | 2.1% |
| Number of Black Leaders per 100 Boards | 9 | 15 | 20 |
| % of Companies with No Black Leaders on Boards | 91.9% | 85.9% | 81.3% |
| % of Black Leaders on Executive Teams | 1.0% | 1.4% | 1.5% |

The BlackNorth Initiative (BNI) in Canada established a target of at least 3.5% Black representation in executive and board roles.²³⁴ Data from the S&P/TSX companies analyzed by the Diversity Institute indicate tangible improvements toward this goal (Table 1). In 2020, Black board representation across 222 companies stood at only 0.9%, but by 2022, it had more than doubled to 2.1%. Notably, among TSX-listed companies that committed to the BNI voluntary pledge, Black board representation reached 3.3%, twice the proportion observed in non-BNI companies (1.6%). Similarly, the proportion of Black executives saw an increase from 1.0% in 2020 to 1.5% in 2022, aligning with the 1.5% representation among BNI signatories.

These findings highlight the potential of voluntary codes to drive meaningful change, fostering greater inclusivity and representation at the highest levels of corporate leadership.²³⁵

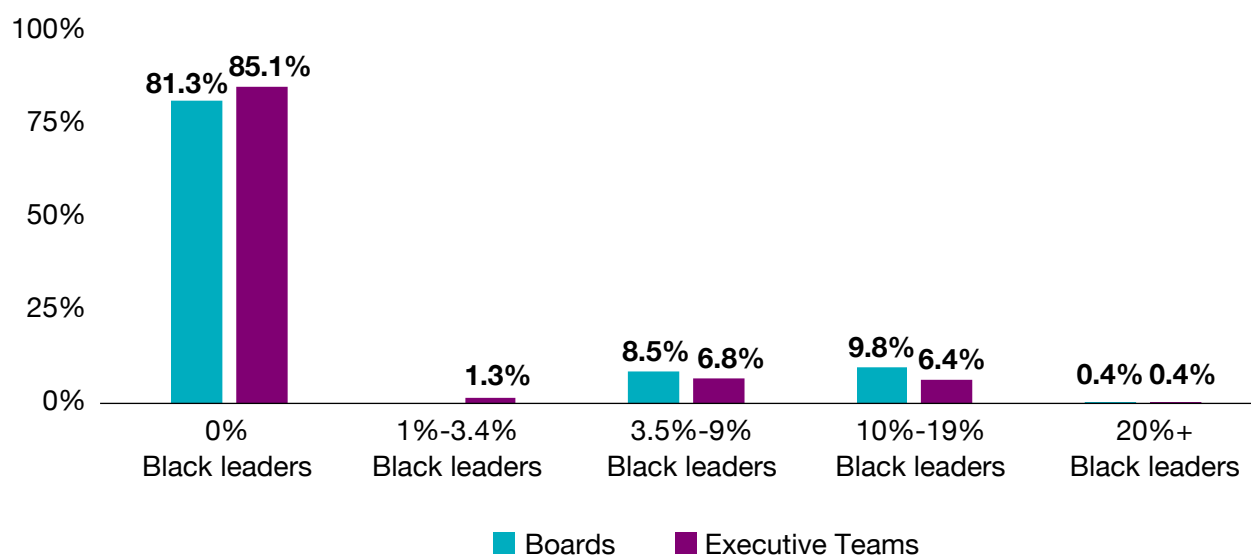
Furthermore, BNI signatory companies are associated with greater representation of Black individuals on corporate boards. A significantly higher percentage of companies participating in the BNI (24.3%) have at least one Black director on their board compared to non-BNI signatory companies (12.6%). Trend held true for the percentage of all director positions held by Black individuals and specifically by Black women, with it being more than double for BNI signatory companies (see Table 2).

Table 2**Black directors on boards of directors, S&P/TSX Composite Index, 2022**

| | BNI Companies (N=37, with 390 DoB) | Non-BNI Companies (N=278, with 1919 DoB) |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| Companies having DoB who was Black | 24.30% | 12.60% |
| DoB who was Black | 4.40% | 1.90% |
| Dob who was Black women | 2.60% | 1.00% |

Figure 14

Percentage of Black leaders on boards and executive teams, S&P/TSX Index, Canada, 2022



Although we have witnessed some modest progress, TSX and S&P/TSX Composite Index companies collectively have yet to achieve BNI's representation goal of 3.5%. A large percentage of companies within the S&P/TSX index have no Black leaders on their boards or executive teams. 81.3% of boards and 85.1% of executive teams had 0% Black leaders in 2022 (Figure 14). Even when companies do have Black leaders, the representation is generally low as seen in Figure 14. The largest share of S&P/TSX Index companies with the highest percentage of Black leaders on boards and executive teams were in the 3.5%-9% (8.5% for boards and 6.8% for executive teams) and 10%-19% shares (9.8% for boards and 6.4% for executive teams). Only 0.4% of both boards and executive teams had 20% or more Black leaders.

Pathways to leadership

The barriers to leadership faced by Black professionals operate at multiple levels. The absence of role models shapes both assumptions and expectations of leaders but also the aspirations of Black people. Extensive research has shown the ways in which notions of leadership are highly gendered and culturally specific. Additionally, when Black people and particularly Black women achieve leadership roles they are often held to higher standards than others, facing insubordination, intense scrutiny and even upward harassment.

Often the career path to leadership in organizations is fairly structured and the under-representation of Black people in management roles limits their opportunities for advancement. According to Statistics Canada, Black men are less likely than non-racialized men to hold management positions, with only 6.3% employed in such roles compared to 11.3% of their counterparts.²³⁶ Similarly, Black women occupy only 4.3% of these positions



compared to 6.9% of non-racialized women. As these roles are often launching pads for more senior executive and board roles, the under-representation of Black people in managerial roles limits their economic mobility, career progression and influence in decision-making. Investing in leadership training to help Black employees acquire the skills and experience necessary to be an effective and impactful leader can serve as a form of succession planning that creates a promotion pathway for those who demonstrate the capacity to be in senior positions.

Extensive research shows the importance of mentorship and sponsorship in helping leaders navigate the unspoken rules and in opening doors to opportunities. Black people are often excluded, particularly in organizations where they are under-represented because of the tendency of people to gravitate to others who are “like” them.

The real barriers are often exacerbated by internal psychological burdens created and reinforced by generations of exclusion. Studies show that Black people, women in particular, often experience imposter syndrome, stereotype threat and performance anxiety that undermine confidence and performance, despite evidence of their achievements and qualifications. These barriers create significant obstacles to career advancement and leadership.^{237, 238}

Initiatives

There is clear evidence that targeted interventions, ranging from legislation and voluntary codes to dedicated support programs, can advance Black leadership. There are no simple solutions to complex problems and improving representation of Black people in leadership and on boards requires action across many levels.

Regulations regarding mandatory reporting

There is good evidence that indicates that comply or explain approaches which rely on organizations to set targets and report on them work well. Regulatory requirements should be extended across sectors and where appropriate include Black people as a category distinct from other racialized groups or “visible minorities”.

Voluntary codes

Voluntary codes have also demonstrated a positive impact on increasing diversity in leadership roles. Preliminary research suggests that voluntary codes are effective in helping corporations formulate commitments, be transparent and accountable. As noted above, signatories to the BlackNorth Initiative have achieved their target of 3.5% representation of Black people on corporate boards. The 50 - 30 Challenge which aims to advance gender parity and increased diversity in boards and senior leadership roles across sectors specifically identifies Black people as an important group to target.

Disaggregated data

What gets measured gets done and we need better disaggregated data across sectors on board and leadership representation. Given the history of the Black community, treating them as a distinct group would help.

Celebrating Black excellence and showcasing role models

Continuing to promote success stories and to highlight Black leaders across sectors is important. Very often during February – Black History Month – we see efforts to profile Black leaders who are absent from the media and public events the other 11 months of the year. More attention paid to showcasing Black leaders is needed to combat stereotypes and assumptions and set examples for aspiring leaders. For example, the documentary “Cool Black North” produced by Rogers Communications should be mandatory viewing.

Reporting for procurement and funding

Additionally, we see more and more government programs requesting disaggregated data in evaluations which is good. It is, at the same time, important to differentiate between organizations that say they serve Black people and those that are led by Black people and ensuring these definitions are understood is important.

Capacity building and skills

Formal programs targeting leadership development for Black people are critical.

Recognizing the barriers that many face financially is important.

There are a growing number of formal and informal leadership development programs for Black leaders that have emerged, some of which are within specific organizations – for example the Government of Canada – and some which are available across organizations. Some formal board and leadership training programs like ICD are now offering scholarships, targeting well-qualified Black leaders. Ensuring these training programs have clearly defined goals and recognize the specific needs of Black leaders is as critical as the appropriate wrap-around supports.



Formal programs targeting leadership development for Black people are critical.

Coaching, mentorship and sponsorship

Extensive research reinforces the importance of the following as critical to leaders' development:

- > **Coaching:**
Advice on how to improve leaderships
- > **Mentorship:**
Investing time in modelling behaviours and providing support
- > **Sponsorship:**
Actually promoting an individuals for appropriate opportunities

Research also shows groups that are under-represented in the workplace are often excluded from these programs. Intentionality is key – whether formal programs of matching new employees and high potential leadership candidates with experienced leaders or informally – ensuring Black employees are included in informal networking – all are critically important strategies to advancing Black leaders. These programs include the Executive Leadership Development Program initiated by the federal government in October 2024, and the BlackNorth Connect program launched by the BlackNorth Initiative.²³⁹

Entrepreneurshipⁱ

Context

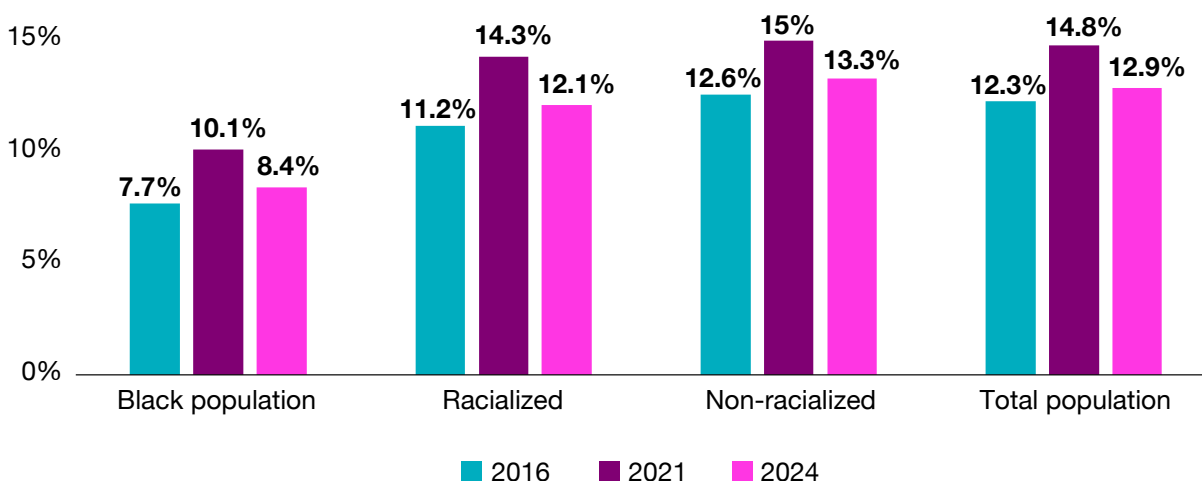
Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of the Canadian economy, playing a critical role in job creation, innovation and economic growth. For Black Canadians, entrepreneurship represents an opportunity for economic independence, community development and generational wealth accumulation. However, despite the increasing presence of Black entrepreneurs, systemic barriers persist, limiting their full participation in Canada's business ecosystem. The concept of intersectionality, which highlights how multiple dimensions of identity—such as race, gender, immigrant status and religion—intersect to create unique experiences and compounded barriers, is crucial for understanding the challenges faced by Black entrepreneurs.^{240, 241, 242, 243, 244}

This section examines the entrepreneurial landscape and how Black entrepreneurs and Black-owned businesses navigate the ecosystem in Canada, assessing both the progress made and challenges that remain in fostering a truly inclusive and equitable environment conducive for Black-owned firm survival rates and growth.

Characteristics of Black entrepreneurs

The share of Black individuals among incorporated and unincorporated business owners has increased for both men and women.²⁴⁵ Between 2005 and 2018, the proportion of Black men and women among self-employed individuals increased steadily. In 2005, 1.8% of self-employed men in Canada were Black, and over the next 13 years, this percentage almost doubled to 3.5% in 2018. Similarly, the percentage of Black self-employed women in Canada increased significantly from 1.3% in 2005 to 2.2% in 2018.²⁴⁶ However, self-employment rates among Black people in Canada remain lower than those of other “racialized people” and the overall population (Figure 15).

i This chapter draws on work published in other sources including Elmi, M., Cukier, W., Donaldson, L. and Leung, V. (2025) State of Black Entrepreneurship in Canada: An Intersectional Analysis, in eds. Elmi, M., et. al, *Immigrant Entrepreneurship*, Palgrave.

Figure 15**Self-employment status by population group in Canada, 2016, 2021 and 2024**

Source: Statistics Canada, various reports (2022, 2023, 2025).

For instance, in 2022, 9.6% of the employed Black population in Canada were self-employed compared to 12.8% of the “racialized” population, 13.7% of the non-racialized population and 13.4% of the total population. By 2023, the self-employment rate among the employed Black population decreased to 8.5% compared to 12.4% of the racialized population, 13.4% of the non-racialized population and 13.1% of the total population.²⁴⁷ Black women have lower self-employment rates than Black men and other immigrant women entrepreneurs and Black women business owners being more likely to have been born in Canada (46.5%) than Black men business owners (35.2%).²⁴⁸

Black entrepreneurs tend to be younger (47 years old, on average) than their white counterparts (53).²⁴⁹ Immigrants play a major role in Black entrepreneurship, with 64.8% of Black men business owners and over 50% of Black women business owners being immigrants.²⁵⁰ The majority have resided in Canada for more than five years, hailing from countries such as Nigeria (14.2%), Jamaica

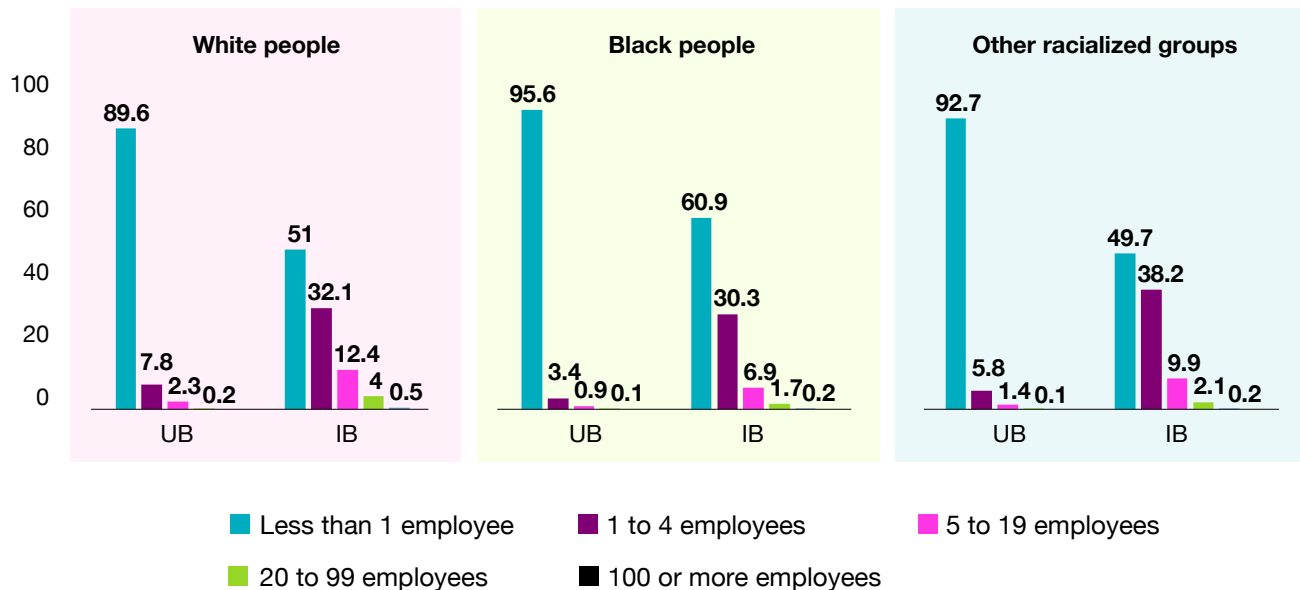
(12.1%), Ethiopia (10.5%), Haiti (10.2%) and Somalia (4.7%).^{251, 252} Geographically, Black business ownership is concentrated in Ontario (53.9%) and Quebec (24.2%), followed by Alberta (12.6%) and British Columbia (4.2%).²⁵³

Black immigrant entrepreneurs have higher levels of education and have deep knowledge of international markets resulting in higher rates of exporting.^{254, 255}

As of 2020, Black Canadians owned 144,980 businesses, more than doubling from 66,880 in 2018.^{256, 257} In terms of the nature of business ownership, 62.9% of Black-owned businesses are self-employed (sole proprietorship) compared to 49.1% of non-Black-owned businesses.²⁵⁸ Black-owned businesses represent 2.9% of unincorporated businesses and 1.6% of privately incorporated businesses, indicating that Black Canadians are more likely to be self-employed through unincorporated ventures than incorporated business owners.²⁵⁹

Figure 16

Distribution of businesses, by race profiles of owners, business type and size, 2018

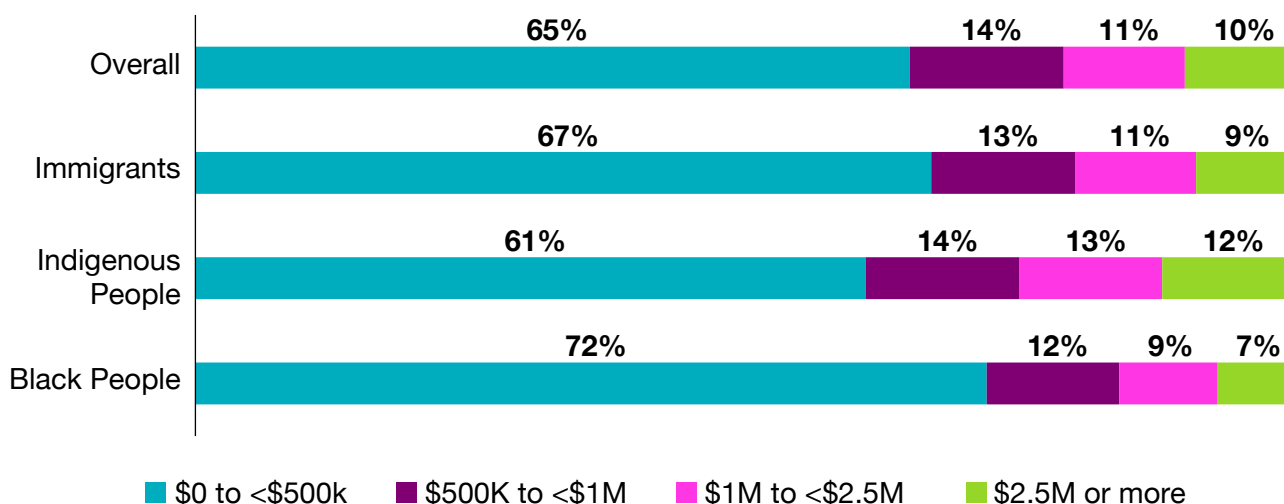


Note: “UB” refers to unincorporated businesses and “IB” stands for incorporated businesses.

In comparison, other racialized entrepreneurs represent 21.8% of unincorporated businesses and 24.2% of incorporated businesses, while white Canadians own the majority, 75.3% of unincorporated and 74.2% of incorporated businesses. Black entrepreneurs are more likely to be new business owners and operate small enterprises compared to white and other racialized entrepreneurs.^{260, 261} It is important to note that there is currently no set definition for Black-owned in terms of ownership percentage, therefore it is not possible to determine the true ownership share of these businesses. Ownership share determines decision making power and transfer power, two important elements in building wealth.

Black entrepreneurs tend to own smaller businesses compared to white entrepreneurs or those who are from other racialized groups (Figure 16). A total of 91.2% of Black entrepreneurs owned micro businesses – the incorporated businesses with fewer than five employees – compared with 87.9% for other racialized groups and 83.1% for White people. Meanwhile, Black-owned businesses (8.8%) are almost half as likely as White-owned businesses (17.0%) to have five or more employees. Black entrepreneurs are 1.4 times less likely to have five or more employees, compared with businesses owners from other racialized groups.²⁶²

Figure 17
Revenues of entrepreneurs



Source: Statistics Canada. (2021) *Number of enterprises with revenue in Canada, 2021, by legal province or territory*.

Almost one-third (29.6%) of Black business owners in Canada are women, and among these women, more than half are immigrants (Figure 17).

The incomes of Black business owners in Canada are lower on average than those of other racialized and non-racialized business owners. According to Statistics Canada, Black men business owners earned an average yearly income of \$56,100 compared to \$65,600 for other racialized men and \$99,400 for white men. The earnings gap among women business owners was smaller but still significant. Black women business owners earned an average yearly income of \$55,700, slightly higher than the \$54,800 for other racialized women, but considerably lower than the \$71,800 earned by white women. Notably, the income discrepancy between men and women was smaller among Black business owners (\$400) compared to other racialized (\$10,800) and white business owners (\$27,600).²⁶³

Black entrepreneurs are concentrated in certain industries. The top sectors for Black-owned businesses are transportation and warehousing (34.3%), real estate and rental leasing (13.4%) and professional, scientific and technical services (10.4%).²⁶⁴ Other racialized groups also show a strong presence in transportation and warehousing (19.8%), while white-owned businesses have significant representation in agriculture (17.7%). The overrepresentation of Black entrepreneurs in transportation and warehousing may be due to lower barriers to entry compared to other sectors, but it also suggests a lack of diversification in business opportunities (Table 3).²⁶⁵

Table 3

Distribution of businesses, by type of business, racial profile of owners and industry, 2018

| | Unincorporated businesses | | | Private incorporated businesses | | |
|---|---------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| | White people | Black people | Other racialized groups | White people | Black people | Other racialized groups |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting | 17.7% | 51.1% | 1.5% | 6.0% | 0.8% | 0.6% |
| Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction, and utilities | 0.8% | 0.3% | 0.3% | 1.2% | 0.3% | 0.2% |
| Construction | 11.0% | 8.3% | 8.2% | 15.4% | 9.8% | 9.8% |
| Manufacturing | 2.0% | 1.4% | 1.3% | 4.1% | 2.5% | 2.8% |
| Wholesale trade | 1.1% | 1.1% | 1.1% | 4.1% | 3.1% | 4.4% |
| Retail trade | 4.8% | 4.8% | 5.2% | 7.2% | 7.8% | 10.0% |
| Transportation and warehousing | 4.4% | 34.3% | 19.8% | 5.0% | 14.2% | 14.1% |
| Information and cultural industries | 1.5% | 1.4% | 1.3% | 1.5% | 1.5% | 1.1% |
| Finance and insurance | 1.0% | 1.3% | 1.6% | 7.4% | 3.2% | 3.5% |
| Real estate and rental and leasing | 20.2% | 13.4% | 27.8% | 7.8% | 4.7% | 5.8% |
| Professional, scientific and technical services | 14.2% | 10.4% | 11.9% | 17.7% | 21.3% | 19.8% |
| Management of companies and enterprises | 0.1% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.7% | 0.3% | 0.3% |
| Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services | 5.0% | 7.7% | 6.5% | 4.3% | 6.5% | 3.9% |
| Educational services | 1.1% | 1.1% | 1.1% | 1.0% | 1.3% | 1.3% |
| Health care and social assistance | 3.9% | 3.4% | 3.4% | 7.2% | 12.3% | 8.6% |
| Arts, entertainment and recreation | 3.0% | 2.8% | 1.7% | 1.4% | 1.3% | 0.7% |
| Accommodation and food services | 1.5% | 1.3% | 1.6% | 3.2% | 3.7% | 8.0% |
| Other services (excluding public administration) | 6.9% | 6.1% | 5.8% | 4.9% | 5.5% | 5.2% |

Notes: Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding. Industries are defined based on the two-digit code in the North American Industry Classification System. Businesses in the public sector and those whose industry is unknown are excluded.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Canadian Employer–Employee Dynamics Database (2018), Census of Population (2001, 2006, 2016) and Nation Household Survey (2011).

Black entrepreneurship is often driven by necessity and opportunity, shaped by the systemic barriers Black individuals face in society. Exclusion, limited career advancement and persistent discrimination push many Black individuals toward self-employment as a means of economic survival.^{266, 267, 268, 269, 270}

At the same time, Black entrepreneurs are also pulled toward business ownership to seize opportunities, serve unmet needs of their communities, promote Black culture and create change.^{271, 272} While there are limited data on Black entrepreneurs, a study of 700 women found evidence of push and pull factors. Many were “pushed” into entrepreneurship because of exclusion from traditional employment or experiences of anti-Black racism, others were “pulled” into entrepreneurship because they saw opportunities to serve their community with new products and services. The most common pull factors for starting a business among the surveyed Black women entrepreneurs were finding an opportunity to provide products or services (87.9%), increased flexibility in work (73.1%) and finding an unexpected opportunity (61.3%).²⁷³

A scoping review by the Black Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (BEKH) highlights how credential devaluation and under-employment force Black entrepreneurs into business ownership as a response to structural inequities. This differentiates Black entrepreneurs from other racialized groups, such as Chinese entrepreneurs, who frequently pursue entrepreneurship for generational wealth accumulation and family business continuity.²⁷⁴

A forthcoming BEKH survey of more than 2,000 Black-owned businesses in Canada found that more than one-quarter (27%) of their customers are Black, confirming how these businesses provide culturally relevant products and services that may otherwise not be available.²⁷⁵ Black entrepreneurship is a response to systemic challenges and a strategic means of serving and empowering Black communities.²⁷⁶

While there is little doubt Black entrepreneurs face multiple barriers, there are examples of substantial success and wealth accumulation. As part of a study by the Diversity Institute on pathways to success, case studies were prepared of some of Canada’s wealthiest Black entrepreneurs across sectors in an effort to understand patterns in their trajectories.²⁷⁷ (Table 4) But even this study confirmed the broader patterns outlined with respect to Black entrepreneurs– most were bootstrapped with little external financing or investment or family wealth.

Table 4**Examples of successful Black entrepreneurs²⁷⁸**

| Name | Company name | Industry | Annual Revenue and/or Net Worth (Estimated) |
|------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Michael Lee-Chin | The Portland Holdings group | Finance and Investment | US\$16.8M in annual revenue US\$1.2B net worth (2025) |
| Wes Hall | WeShall Investments, The BlackNorth Initiative, and Kingsdale Advisors | Investment Management | US\$128.9M in annual revenue (WeShall Investments) (n.d.) US\$26.1M in annual revenue (Kingsdale Advisors) (n.d.) |
| Abel Makkonen Tesfaye (The Weeknd) | The Weeknd XO Inc. (aka XO) & HXHOUSE Inc. | Creative Industries | US\$92M in annual revenue US\$40M net worth (2019) |
| Aubrey Drake Graham | OVO Sounds record | Creative Industries | US\$49M in annual revenue (2020) |
| Deon Nicholas | Forethought Technologies Inc. | Technology | US\$26.9M in annual revenue (n.d.) |
| Brandeis Denham Jolly | FLOW 93.5 CFXJ-FM, Donsview Nursing Home | Information and Culture | CA\$20M - \$30m net worth (2022) |
| Frank Baylis | Baylis Medical Company Inc., OME Group (sold in 2011), Righteous Films | Health Technology, Research, Consulting, Video Production | US\$100M net worth (2025) |
| Byron Peart | WANT Les Essentials, GOODEE | Retail Trade | US\$17.3M in annual revenue (n.d.) |
| Frantz Saintelley | LeddarTech | Technology | US\$31.08M market cap (2025) |
| Tefari Bailey | Husty Financial | Finance and Insurance | US\$15M (valuation in 2021) |
| Claudette McGowan | Protexxa Inc. | Technology | US\$13.9M in annual revenue (n.d.) |
| Dexter Peart | WANT Les Essentials, GOODEE | Retail Trade | US\$2.7m in annual revenue (n.d.) |
| Keenan Pascal | Token Naturals, Token Bitters | Food and Beverage | US\$2.2M in annual revenue (Token Naturals) (n.d.) |
| Spencer Badu | Spencer Badu | Retail Trade | US\$2M in annual revenue (n.d.) |
| Aurora James | Brother Vellies | Retail Trade | US\$3M net worth US\$1M in annual revenue (2022) |
| Armstrong Murira | Simmunome | Biotechnology | US\$775,000 in annual revenue (n.d.) |
| Vivian Kaye | KinkyKurlyYaki | Retail Trade | >US\$1M in annual revenue (2023) |

Table 5

Survey results from Black Business and Professional Association(BBPA) compared to data from Canadian Federation of Independent Business(CFIB) members

| | CFIB Members | BBPA Members |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| The Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy will not help my business | 37% | 80% |
| My business is fully open | 20% | 10% |
| I have doubts that my business will reopen | 32% | 60% |
| I am concerned that my business will have to close permanently | 39% | 85% |
| My business can endure less than a month under current conditions | 25% | 85% |
| No capacity to take on debt | 56% | 98% |

Comparative impact of COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on businesses, but Black-owned businesses in Canada were disproportionately affected, exacerbating pre-existing challenges and introducing new barriers.²⁷⁹ These businesses faced greater financial strain, had less access to government support and experienced higher risks of permanent closure. A survey conducted by the Black Business and Professional Association (BBPA) in Ontario underscores the severity of the situation, revealing structural inequities in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Virtually all (98%) of Black Business owners reported that they could not take on additional debt compared to 56% of Canadian businesses and yet loans were a core piece of the COVID relief strategy. (Table 5).²⁸⁰

Black entrepreneurs struggled significantly with financial stability during the pandemic. Only 10% of Black-owned businesses were fully operational, compared to much higher rates in the general business population.

A staggering 80% of Black businesses reported insufficient cash flow to cover essential expenses, such as rent and payroll.²⁸¹ This cash shortage was further confirmed by a study of African Nova Scotian businesses, which found that 52% of respondents had no cash, or less than a month's worth of cash reserves. These financial struggles led many Black business owners to rely on personal savings (64%) or seek support from family and friends (39%), highlighting a lack of accessible institutional financial support.²⁸²

A key factor in these financial struggles was limited access to government relief programs. The BBPA survey found that 80% of Black-owned businesses believed the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy would not help them, compared to just 37% of all businesses. Similarly, four out of five Black business owners doubted their eligibility for the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA), while only one in five of all businesses expressed similar concerns.²⁸³



Many Black entrepreneurs viewed the application process as complex and exclusionary, which discouraged participation in these programs. As a result, only 25.5% of Black business owners applied for CEBA, and even fewer applied for other government support initiatives.²⁸⁴

The uncertainty surrounding financial relief led to widespread concern about business survival. A remarkable 85% of Black business owners feared permanent closure, a stark contrast to the 39% reported among all businesses.²⁸⁵ The lack of financial security was dire, with most Black-owned businesses indicating they could survive for less than a month under the pandemic's economic conditions.²⁸⁶

In addition to financial struggles, Black business owners were more likely to experience indirect economic hardships due to the pandemic. A 2023 survey found that 21% of Black respondents missed work or school to care for a sick family member, compared to just 12% of non-racialized participants.²⁸⁷ This added caregiving burden further negatively affected business operations and financial stability, reducing the ability of Black entrepreneurs to maintain or rebuild their enterprises.

Barriers and enablers to entrepreneurship

Regardless of their motivations, Black entrepreneurs face significant barriers to success, often struggling to secure financing, gain credibility and attract clients. Black entrepreneurs feel marginalized and excluded from the existing entrepreneurial ecosystem, which negatively impacts their participation in entrepreneurial activities.²⁸⁸ These challenges are further compounded for those with intersectional identities (e.g., Black immigrants, Black women, Black Muslims, etc.).

Entrepreneurial Ecosystems (EEs) encompass institutional, organizational and other systemic factors that interact and foster the identification and development of entrepreneurial opportunities.²⁸⁹ These ecosystems consist of interconnected actors and processes that connect, mediate and govern the entrepreneurial environment, either enabling or impeding the success of entrepreneurs.^{290, 291} Research has found that EEs systematically exclude women, immigrants and other diverse entrepreneurs, including Black entrepreneurs.^{292, 293, 294}

To fully understand the barriers faced by Black entrepreneurs, it is essential to examine the entrepreneurship ecosystem holistically, considering the interaction of broad societal factors — such as socio-economic conditions, policies, cultural values and stereotypes — alongside organizational factors, including the policies and practices of financial

institutions, educational institutions, investors and business intermediaries. Additionally, individual factors, including knowledge, skills and motivations, must be considered not only in relation to Black entrepreneurs but also to the “gatekeepers” and decision-makers whose bias, experiences and lack of understanding can present barriers.

Media representation and role models

Research shows that Black entrepreneurs believe that the media does not represent them well and risks perpetuating harmful stereotypes that further fuel anti-Black racism.^{295, 296} While recently there has been more attention focused on presenting examples of Black success and achievement, stories of Black entrepreneurs are still far from mainstream. The lack of visibility influences public perceptions of Black entrepreneurs and also shapes the entrepreneurial aspirations of Black individuals.²⁹⁷

The presence of role models from similar backgrounds has been shown to empower racialized individuals and minority groups to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities.^{298, 299} A growing number of Black business awards highlight the contributions of Black business owners. Another important platform that highlights Black achievement is WEKH's See It. Be It. campaign, which has documented and profiled over 2,000 successful women entrepreneurs in Canada including 200 Black women.³⁰⁰

Government initiatives and support programs

Government initiatives and support programs play an important role in advancing Black entrepreneurship. For example, preferential procurement programs in the US have been found to effectively support Black- and Latino-owned businesses in establishing themselves, expanding their businesses and entering market segments in which they have been underrepresented.³⁰¹ In Canada, government initiatives and support programs for Black entrepreneurs have been designed to address historical disadvantages, foster economic development and promote generational wealth.

Black entrepreneurs continue to advocate for targeted support and equitable access to funding and the Government of Canada launched the Black Entrepreneurship Program (BEP) in September 2020 to address systemic barriers and support Black-owned businesses.³⁰² A partnership between the Government of Canada, Black-led business organizations and financial institutions aimed at helping Black entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses. The \$265 million initiative provides funding, resources and mentorship tailored to the specific needs of Black entrepreneurs.³⁰³



The Black Entrepreneurship Program aims to help Black entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses. The \$265 million initiative provides funding, resources and mentorship tailored to the specific needs of Black entrepreneurs.

The Canadian innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem includes financial institutions, venture capitalists and investors, incubators and accelerators, educational institutions and intermediaries such as government agencies and non-profits, which provide training, advising, loans, grants and tax credits as well as large customers. Bias is often embedded in their policies and practices and a gender and diversity lens is critical to create inclusion.

Access to financing

Black businesses are often under-banked or unbanked, a situation that worsened during the pandemic when many Black entrepreneurs experienced difficulties securing financial support.^{304, 305} A study of Black entrepreneurs in Canada conducted during the pandemic revealed perceptions of racism and systemic bias within the banking system, as well as a lack of cultural understanding among financial institutions.³⁰⁶

Inadequate access to financial capital is a common constraint for Black-owned businesses.^{307, 308, 309, 310} Research indicates Black entrepreneurs are more likely to have their credit and bank loan applications denied, with one study finding that Black-owned businesses have a 30% higher rejection rate than similar white-owned businesses³¹¹ and Black business owners are often subjected to higher interest rates than their white counterparts.³¹² Even in programs offered by financial institutions targeting Black entrepreneurs, we see interest rates almost double the going rate. Black businesses face greater scrutiny in lending processes³¹³ and lower loan application approval rates.³¹⁴ In addition, the 5 C's of credit (character, capacity, capital, collateral and conditions), used for assessing financial risk, often fail to take into account the specific context and history of the Black community and the preponderance of Black entrepreneurs who are also immigrants compounds the challenges.

A Senate report on inclusive entrepreneurship in Canada discovered that credit ratings, lack of credit history and low generational wealth levels place Black entrepreneurs at a disproportionate disadvantage compared to long-established entrepreneurs.³¹⁵

Designing and adopting equitable lending criteria by financial institutions tailored to prevent systemic barriers from affecting Black entrepreneurs who possess a viable business plan can increase access to essential funding necessary improving survival rates of Black-owned businesses.³¹⁶ Eligibility criteria



often exclude Black entrepreneurs, such as requirements for incorporation, revenue and other paperwork. Additionally, programs often lack the necessary supports to engage the community effectively or the transparency and feedback mechanisms needed to build capacity.^{317, 318}

Personal savings are the primary source of initial funding for many startups and home equity, is often leveraged by entrepreneurs to secure additional financial capital. Consequently, gaps in home ownership - 71.9% of the Canadian population lived in a dwelling owned by one or some members of their household versus 45.2% of the Black population - has a significant impact on access to capital.³¹⁹ Lower rates of homeownership among the Black population has resulted in diminished wealth creation and a large study of the real estate industry identified bias in financial institutions as a major impediment to Black people. The ongoing experiences of discrimination also produce what is referred to as “discouraged borrower syndrome” where Black entrepreneurs expect to be refused and so do not even apply.^{320, 321} Studies have also highlighted the needs for leveraging Black-led intermediaries to ensure equity-deserving groups have access and support.^{322, 323, 324}

Only 0.3% of venture capital disbursed in United States reaches Black founders—while fostering economic equity. Even with these programs in place, there needs to be a concerted effort to ensure that Black entrepreneurs are aware of available support.³²⁵

A study conducted by McKinsey & Company found that Black-owned businesses in Canada are denied financing at eight times the rate of regular businesses.³²⁶ Another survey of 500 Black business owners in Canada found that 55% of respondents reported being denied a bank loan at least once when starting their businesses, underscoring the economic discrimination faced by Black entrepreneurs.^{327, 328, 329} A survey conducted by The Federation of African Canadian Economics found that 63% of respondents indicated difficulty accessing scale-up finance to grow their business, although average Black business owners had identical credit scores compared to the average Canadian.³³⁰

Barriers for Black entrepreneurs are often amplified for Black women, who also face gender stereotypes and competing demands.³³¹ In a survey of 700 Black women entrepreneurs, almost half (47%) indicated access to funding, finance, capital and sales as was their most pressing concern. While many felt somewhat comfortable approaching the federal and provincial governments and non-profit community organizations, they reported lower comfort levels when applying for funding or loans from banks.

One key initiative under the Black Entrepreneurship Program (BEP) was the Black Entrepreneurship Loan Fund (BELF), administered by the Federation of African Canadian Economics (FACE) which provides loans of up to \$250,000 to Black business owners across Canada. The fund includes a \$30 million investment from the Canadian government and an additional \$130 million

investment from the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC). The program also includes a pilot microloan initiative for Black entrepreneurs seeking loans between \$10,000 and \$25,000.³³² Challenges remain in the investment and loan readiness of applicants, the eligibility and selection criteria (which are largely defined by BDC), as well as the terms of the loans, particularly with accelerating interest rates. BDC's selection criteria mainly applies for loans between \$100,000 to \$250,000. FACE has final approval of loans below \$100,000, exclusive of the micro loan pilot where credit unions have the final decision. Between 2023 and 2024, this fund disbursed \$12.9 million in loans to 152 Black Canadian entrepreneurs with another \$60m approved.³³³

While these efforts represent a step in the right direction, awareness and accessibility remain critical issues. A study found that only 22% of Black entrepreneurs were very familiar with major federal funding institutions such as the Business Development Bank of Canada and Export Development Canada. Furthermore, many Black business owners believed that these programs were not available to immigrants, discouraging them from seeking support.³³⁴ A survey conducted by BEKH revealed that more than one-half of Black entrepreneurs (54%) were uninformed of government funding initiatives and programs, while only 16% indicated that they had received funding.³³⁵ Moreover, about half of the Black entrepreneurs surveyed stated that they are not comfortable at all applying for funding and loans from FinTech lenders.³³⁶



Futurpreneur is a national non-profit organization that provides financing, mentoring and resources to young entrepreneurs aged 18-39 with its Black Entrepreneur Startup Program (BESP), providing flexible startup business loans of up to \$60,000, along with free mentoring, networking opportunities and business planning tools and resources to young Black entrepreneurs.

Beyond BEP, other support programs in Canada tailor assistance to Black entrepreneurs. For example, Futurpreneur is a national non-profit organization that provides financing, mentoring and resources to young entrepreneurs aged 18-39 with its Black Entrepreneur Startup Program (BESP) providing flexible startup business loans of up to \$60,000, along with free mentoring, networking opportunities and business planning tools and resources to young Black entrepreneurs. The BDC also supports Black entrepreneurs through various financing options and advisory services. In addition to its commitments to the BEP and BESP, BDC has partnered with BKR Capital to deliver the Black Innovation Fund, a venture capital fund that invests in Canadian pre-seed and seed-stage technology companies founded by Black entrepreneurs. However, formal evaluations are needed to more accurately assess the impact of these investments.³³⁷

Canadian chartered banks have developed targeted programs to support Black entrepreneurs:

- > **The Bank of Montreal (BMO)** provides loans of up to \$150,000 using specialized lending criteria to Black entrepreneurs across Canada.
- > **The Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce's (CIBC)** Black Entrepreneurship Program provides loans ranging from \$5,000 to \$250,000 for equipment and leasehold improvements and \$5,000 to \$100,000 for working capital as well as a non-repayable loan of up to \$2,000 for Black business owners.
- > **The Royal Bank of Canada's (RBC)** Black Entrepreneur Business Loan offers up to \$250,000 to eligible Black entrepreneurs in Canada
- > **Scotiabank's** Black-Led Business Financing Program provides loans of \$25,000 to \$250,000 for capital investments and \$25,000 to \$50,000 for working capital.
- > **Toronto-Dominion Bank (TD)** offers the Black Entrepreneur Credit Access Program, which is available across various products including lines of credit. The program offers interest-only payments on selected products for up to 12 months and access to support via the Black Customer Experience Team

To date, however, there is little data available on levels of participation or the impact of these programs.³³⁸

One of the challenges of the financial supports currently available to Black entrepreneurs is the alignment to their structures, sectors and needs. As previously noted, most Black-owned businesses lack capacity to take on debt and also may not meet the criteria for traditional loan financing. While there are Black entrepreneurs with businesses generating over \$500,000 per year, a sweet spot for many financial institutions, most Black-owned businesses are considerably smaller.

In addition, more than half of all businesses in Canada start with less than \$5000 investments and these micro loans and grants are difficult to access. This was evidenced by the fact that 700 Black women applied for a chance to receive 10 prizes valued at \$10,000 or less as part of the Rise up competition. New programs are emerging but the biggest gap for Black entrepreneurs with micro businesses is access to micro financing or grants.³³⁹ Abacus data shows that 75% of Canadian Black entrepreneurs find accessing financing, funding or capital the most difficult challenge that they face. These respondents stated that it would be challenging to secure financial support if they required funding amounts of \$10,000 to support their business.³⁴⁰



Data shows that 75% of Canadian Black entrepreneurs find accessing financing, funding or capital the most difficult challenge that they face.

Access to networks and social capital

The lack of social capital and connections to established business networks is a key barrier for Black entrepreneurs. This gap results in a shortage of mentoring, sponsorship and other forms of support needed to secure financing, customers and partners. In a 2021 study, 45% of Black entrepreneur respondents stated that the resources and support from Black-led organizations have been “essential” or “very important” to their businesses. The responses further highlight the importance of trust in building business relationships and accessing networks and the role of intermediaries.³⁴¹ In addition, “empowered Black entrepreneurs” who felt that they had the skills required to achieve their goals and grow their business were more likely to report having “strong, well-developed support networks and benefits from mentors.”

Public procurement and supplier diversity

Public procurement in Canada accounts for more than \$200 billion in economic activity in Canada every year and the Federal government and many provincial and municipal governments are at various stages of implementing supplier diversity programs. Additionally, more than 40% of large businesses in Canada have some diversity procurement programs.³⁴² In Canada there is certification for businesses owned by racialized and Black entrepreneurs. The Canadian Aboriginal and Minority Supplier Council (CAMSC) certifies businesses owned by racialized and Indigenous peoples. Black businesses can become certified for local, national and global supplier diversity programs through Black Entrepreneurs and Businesses of Canada’s (BEBC) Black Business Certification Program.

Participating in the program offers Black business owners the opportunity to expand market share, grow their companies, discover new partners and create new revenue streams (Black Entrepreneurs and Businesses of Canada, 2020). Black women entrepreneurs can certify their businesses with the Women Business Enterprises Canada Council (WBE Canada).³⁴³ While there remains good will regarding supplier diversity, more specifics about the proportion of expenditures directed to equity deserving groups is needed.



Incubators, accelerators, intermediaries, educational institutions

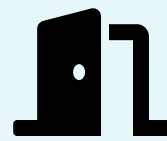
Incubators and accelerators provide mentoring, training, access to networks, resources and often space and facilities for early-stage companies while accelerators support developing companies to help them become stable, self-sufficient businesses.^{344, 345} Lack of diversity and lived experience among people involved in gatekeeping, support and decision-making was also identified as an issue.^{346, 347} Some studies have suggested they can make a difference for racialized entrepreneurs^{348, 349} but their impact on Black entrepreneurship remains understudied.

Part of the federal government's investment has been to strengthen ecosystem players providing supports for Black entrepreneurs. Many incubators and accelerators now offer programs targeting Black entrepreneurs and others have emerged specifically aimed at Black entrepreneurs. There are incubators created by Black-led organizations, including the CASA Foundation, Black Business Initiative, 3737, BBPA, as well as smaller organizations such as DeSedulous Women, tailored to meet the specific needs of diverse Black entrepreneurs. To date, there is limited research on the ways in which these programs and services operate or their impacts although they seem to hold promise.

Incubators have historically focused on sectors (e.g., technology) where Black entrepreneurs are likely to be underrepresented. In addition, the processes, services, supports and staffing within these incubators were often not conducive to creating inclusive environments.³⁵⁰ In addition, new incubators focused on food, fashion, music and cultural industries are showing promise in supporting Black entrepreneurs.

Skills and capacity building

Extensive research exists on entrepreneurial competencies—the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for success – at the same time, there is considerable data to indicate the Black entrepreneurs require different approaches and wrap around supports, sometimes because of their previous experiences with educational institutions. However, there is evidence to suggest that the lived experience in the Black community requires different approaches to developing entrepreneurial intent, competencies, pedagogy and wraparound supports. While Black entrepreneurs may benefit from improved skills, such as business planning and financial literacy, access to mentoring and coaching and other supports they need to be delivered through a culturally sensitive lens. Other research suggests that business education and financial literacy training can be instrumental in assisting Black entrepreneurs to navigate the funding process and sustain their businesses.³⁵¹ The lack of targeted programs that consider the intersecting identities and risk factors for Black entrepreneurs was also an issue.^{352, 353}



A recent survey of over 300 Black entrepreneurs in Canada found that 56% of respondents were considered unempowered entrepreneurs, meaning that they did not have access to adequate support and advice for business challenges and had not mastered the skills required to run their businesses effectively.

Black entrepreneurs in Canada face significant barriers in accessing business education and training opportunities, which can impede their ability to develop the essential skills needed to start and grow their businesses.³⁵⁴ A recent survey of over 300 Black entrepreneurs in Canada found that 56% of respondents were considered unempowered entrepreneurs, meaning that they did not have access to adequate support and advice for business challenges and had not mastered the skills required to run their businesses effectively.³⁵⁵ Another survey of over 250 Black entrepreneurs in Alberta found that only 22% of participants reported having any kind of training or education to start or run their businesses, with many acknowledging gaps in understanding the available funding options, how to access them and how various financial instruments work.³⁵⁶

Bridging these and other skills gaps requires tailored training and development programs that empower Black entrepreneurs to build sustainable and scalable businesses. Research through the Future Skill Centre has led to the development of competency frameworks which define skills needed based on stage of development, sector and lived experience as well as the best practices for wrap around supports whether in terms of access to counselling, technology, childcare, or other supports.³⁵⁷

Research suggests that higher levels of education are associated with more business success so the investments in basic education and literacy are foundational not just for pathways to employment but also entrepreneurship.³⁵⁸ Other research, for example on retailers and service providers in Little Jamaica in Toronto, has suggested that basic literacy and numeracy levels are barriers in business. Recognizing that some segments of Black entrepreneurs have lower levels of educational attainment and literacy as well as confidence is critically important in crafting programs to meet their needs. Through a series of studies on Black entrepreneurship programs supported by the Future Skills Centre, researchers have suggested the need for a more rigorous definition of entrepreneurship competencies taking into account the stage of business, sector and demographic differences.³⁵⁹ While there are a plethora of entrepreneurship training programs targeting Black entrepreneurs, there is limited evaluation or research on what works for whom.

Combating anti-Black racism

While training alone has limited impact³⁶⁰ and must be accompanied by changes to structures, policies and processes, there is evidence that anti-Black racism exists at many levels of the entrepreneurial ecosystem and needs to be addressed. The focus must not be on “fixing” Black entrepreneurs but rather on creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for Black entrepreneurs by shifting the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of gatekeepers, decision-makers, teachers, coaches, mentors and others who work in roles supporting entrepreneurs.

Systemic challenges such as limited access to funding, high borrowing costs and a lack of mentorship and education make it difficult to scale their businesses.³⁶¹ A survey of 342 Black business owners found that 82% relied on personal savings or credit cards for funding, while only 19% trusted banks for financing.³⁶² Financial institutions are often perceived as biased against Black entrepreneurs, using exclusionary criteria that make it harder to access funding. Similarly, a study by Bain & Company found that 80% of Black entrepreneurs self-finance.³⁶³

These financial constraints contribute to lower profitability among Black-owned businesses, which report an average profit margin of 8.5%, compared to 14.9% for white-owned businesses and 10.1% for other racialized entrepreneurs.³⁶⁴ Many Black entrepreneurs struggle to pay themselves from their business earnings, further exacerbating economic challenges.³⁶⁵ These issues are particularly pronounced for Black women entrepreneurs, who tend to operate in major cities, run smaller or newer businesses and typically earn less than \$100,000 annually.³⁶⁶

The impact of systemic inequities is widely recognized within the community, with a 2021 survey revealing that 76% of Black entrepreneurs believe their race makes it harder to succeed.³⁶⁷ These ongoing disparities highlight the urgent need for more equitable access to resources, funding and support to foster sustainable Black-owned businesses. Consumer discrimination is another challenge. Black-owned businesses frequently face consumer bias, which reduces demand for their products and services.³⁶⁸ Research shows that Black-owned businesses often charge up to 41% less than white-owned businesses due to lower consumer demand, primarily driven by racial bias.^{369, 370}

Despite these challenges, Black entrepreneurs remain optimistic. In the second quarter of 2024, Black business owners (39.5%) were more likely to report a very optimistic future outlook over the next 12 months in comparison to all business owners (24.5%).³⁷¹ This resilience highlights the determination of Black business owners to thrive despite systemic barriers.



Conclusions & Recommendations

The economic realities of Black Canadians are shaped by a complex interplay of historical, social and structural factors that have contributed to persistent disparities. While notable progress has been made in areas such as educational attainment, median income and entrepreneurship, significant gaps remain in income equality.

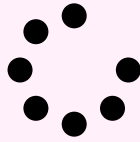
Achieving economic equity requires dismantling systemic barriers that have historically hindered Black Canadians' progress. This calls for concerted efforts from all levels of government, businesses, community organizations and civil society to create more inclusive policies, programs and opportunities.

We need to ground our work in a solid understanding of how we got here and how the history of slavery, segregation and anti-Black racism has shaped our institutions and our culture and how this in turn has limited opportunities for Black Canadians.

And evidence is key - Disaggregated data is critical for understanding the unique challenges faced by Black Canadians. It also enables policymakers, businesses and community organizations to set targets and track progress in reducing disparities, reinforcing the principle that “what gets measured, gets done.”

We need a systemic perspective—considering societal, organizational and individual factors—reveals the interconnected nature of the economic barriers Black Canadians face. Addressing these barriers requires strategies that enhance human capital (education and skills development), social capital (networking opportunities) and financial capital (access to funding).

Education is a cornerstone of economic advancement. Over the past two decades, educational attainment among Black Canadians has increased, opening pathways to stable and higher-income careers. Continued investment in academic support and mentorship programs, scholarships and initiatives that address barriers in the education system are essential to fostering long-term economic empowerment.



There is growing commitment among Canadian employers to address anti-Black racism in the workplace. This includes acknowledging systemic barriers in employment and taking proactive steps to eliminate them.

There is growing commitment among Canadian employers to address anti-Black racism in the workplace. This includes acknowledging systemic barriers in employment and taking proactive steps to eliminate them. Organizations are setting targets for recruiting, retaining and promoting Black employees while implementing hiring strategies to attract diverse talent. Inclusive workplace initiatives, such as anti-racism training, mentorship programs and employee resource groups, must be sustained and expanded.

Black Canadians with post-secondary degrees encounter various forms of anti-Black racism that hinder their career progression and upward mobility. These include, but are not limited to, hiring discrimination, wage gaps, limited promotion opportunities, microaggressions, stereotyping and lack of mentors and role models. To combat these challenges, it is essential to adopt strategies that improve hiring practices, workplace culture and leadership pathways. These strategies must balance between supply-side

interventions that equip Black Canadians with the skills and resources to succeed, and demand-side interventions that ensure employers create job opportunities for Black employees.

The significance of Black leadership, Black-led and Black-focused institutions or organizations designing and directing initiatives to address systemic challenges faced by Black Canadians is paramount. The principle of ‘nothing for us, without us’ denotes the importance of engaging, supporting, and funding organizations that incorporate the participation of Black people and communities as an integral component of their purpose and mission. It is imperative that leadership within these organizations deeply understand the issues Black individuals face in order to tailor solutions and provide a more connected and authentic approach to tackling racial disparities. Consider organizations like The Federation of African Canadian Economics, Foundation for Black Communities, Supporting Black Canadian Communities Initiative, Black Opportunity Fund, and BNI, that exemplify Black leadership and demonstrate impactful advancements through their Black-led and Black-focused approach.

Small and medium-sized enterprises are the lifeblood of the Canadian economy. Ensuring the entrepreneurial ecosystem supports Black entrepreneurs should be a key priority. Recognizing the structural differences – that Black businesses are smaller, have fewer employees and are concentrated in services



sectors, that most Black entrepreneurs are self-employed rather than majority owners of SMEs and that their annual income is lower than others – are all critical considerations in ensuring access to supports.

Taking action

Most of this is not new, but we have to translate the analysis into action. Here are the top-level recommendations:

> **Name the problem**

Ensure Canadians understand our history of slavery, segregation and anti-Black racism and how it has shaped institutions and undermined education, employment, leadership and entrepreneurship opportunities for Black people in our country.

> **Reiterate the business case**

This is not just about values or compliance with legislation and regulation, this is about access to talent, to markets, to innovation and to economic success and sustainable communities.

> **Continue to refine our legislative and policy frameworks and targeted programs aimed at leveling the playing field**

Bring a robust gender and diversity lens to the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs recognizing the need for a focus on the Black community.

> **Challenge stereotypes and bias**

Celebrate examples of Black excellence and success across sectors – in politics, in law, in science and medicine, in engineering, in the corporate, nonprofit and government sectors, in entrepreneurship as well as culture, because if you can't see it you can't be it.

> **Collect disaggregated data about education, employment, leadership and entrepreneurship processes and outcomes**

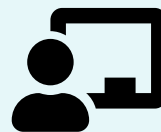
The current categorization of “visible minority” or racialized people obscures important issues concerning the Black community. Most importantly, it is key to evaluating and getting feedback on our efforts and to understanding “what works, for whom”.

> **Invest upstream**

Educational success is core to social mobility in Canada and much work is needed to improve representation of Black people as role models at all levels – teachers, principals, staff, professors and administrators – to address the challenges. Research shows Black students with Black teachers are more likely to succeed, that inclusive career counselling, tutoring and work integrated learning are game changers.

> **Create pathways to postsecondary education and to employment with appropriate counselling, wrap around supports, confidence building and resources**

Identify skills needed for future success and create innovative strategies to embed work integrated learning into programs.



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> **Recognize the impact of socio-economic status and access to social capital and the ways in which privilege shapes outcomes**

We need to recognize that while many people have talent, some have advantages in the opportunities that they are given and the resources they have to support them. There is a big difference, for example, between someone who had to work thirty hours a week to put themselves through university and one who did not. Or between someone whose well-connected parents were able to open doors and coach them and someone whose parents worked around the clock and spoke English as a second language. We need to be sure when we are assessing “talent” that our vision is not obscured.

> **Continue to work across sectors to embed commitments to equity diversity and inclusion in organizational strategies**

Whether a hospital, government agency, financial institutions, manufacturer or community agencies, every aspect of the operation – governance, human resources, culture, product design and delivery, partnerships – will benefit from a gender and diversity lens and accountability framework. Challenge assumptions and bias wherever they appear.

> **Recognize the extent to which our assumptions about leadership have embedded gender and racial bias embedded**

Reconsider old ways of identifying and grooming successors and tap into new talent. Also understand the ways in which women and diverse leaders often face added barriers and are held to higher standards than “the usual suspects”. Find ways to support them.

> **Recognize small and medium enterprises are the foundation of our economy**

When Black business owners succeed, we all benefit.

> **Most importantly, challenge your personal assumptions and recognize the need for continuous learning to be well informed and useful allies**

Advancing the Black community lifts us all.



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