

Advancing Workplace Inclusion for Black Immigrants in Northwest Territories



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ProEdge Consulting Group Ltd. is a Canada-based educational and organizational consulting firm co-founded by Dr. Henry Dimingu and Dr. Idowu Mary Mogaji, whose combined professional experience spans more than three decades of leadership practice, academic administration, instructional delivery, organizational capacity-building, program development, and government advisory. Our mission is to empower institutions and organizations through innovative, research-grounded professional development that leads to improved performance, strengthened leadership pipelines, and sustainable organizational growth. We have successfully partnered with organizations across sectors to design, implement, and deliver impactful learning experiences and strategic initiatives.

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Executive Summary

Equitable participation in Canada's labor market remains a critical priority, particularly for racialized immigrant populations in northern and remote regions such as the Northwest Territories (NWT). Black immigrant youth in the NWT face complex challenges that intersect with race, migration status, geography, and limited institutional supports, often resulting in underemployment, credential devaluation, and exclusion from meaningful professional opportunities. Despite growing national conversations around diversity, inclusion, and reconciliation, the experiences of Black immigrant youth in northern contexts remain insufficiently examined, leaving a critical gap in research, policy, and practice. This study addresses that gap by generating evidence on the systemic barriers and potential strategies that shape labor market outcomes for this population, offering insights relevant to policymakers, employers, and community organizations seeking to foster equitable workforce participation.

The research was guided by four central questions: what systemic barriers in credential recognition and workplace integration hinder equitable employment outcomes; how can employers adopt equitable hiring practices and address anti-Black racism; what strategies effectively promote inclusive workplaces and improved employment outcomes; and how can decent work and economic growth be promoted for Black immigrant youth to advance Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 10. A mixed-methods, participatory approach was employed to capture both measurable patterns and the lived experiences of participants. Fifty-seven Black immigrants completed an online survey exploring employment access, credential recognition, experiences of inclusion or exclusion, mentorship, and career progression. Complementing this, twelve participants engaged in a photovoice exercise to document challenges and aspirations through photography and narrative reflections, while ten participants

contributed to two virtual focus groups discussing employment trajectories, workplace integration, and strategies for inclusion. Triangulation of these methods, combined with active participant involvement, strengthened the validity and relevance of the findings.

The study revealed that credential recognition remains a central and persistent barrier. Participants consistently reported that internationally acquired qualifications, particularly from non-Western countries, were undervalued or dismissed, limiting access to meaningful employment and forcing many into positions below their skill levels. This systemic devaluation delays career progression and reinforces racialized hierarchies within the labor market, reflecting broader patterns of structural inequity documented in Canadian research. Similarly, the requirement for Canadian work experience emerged as a paradoxical and exclusionary mechanism. Participants described how employers frequently disregarded international expertise, citing insufficient local experience, thereby perpetuating a cycle in which skilled immigrants were prevented from contributing fully to the labor market. This practice disproportionately disadvantaged Black immigrants and reinforced assumptions that professional skills acquired abroad are inferior or irrelevant.

Policy-driven exclusion was also evident in the impact of the Indigenous Employment Policy. While this policy plays a critical role in addressing historical inequities for Indigenous peoples, participants reported feeling systematically excluded from government employment, the largest source of stable work in the NWT. This underscores the importance of adopting intersectional policy frameworks that balance the priorities of different marginalized groups while avoiding unintended exclusion. Underemployment was a widespread consequence of these systemic barriers, with participants frequently employed in low-paying, precarious roles despite holding advanced degrees and significant professional experience. The emotional and economic

toll of underemployment was profound, encompassing frustration, diminished self-worth, and ongoing professional disillusionment.

Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated notable resilience and adaptability. Many pursued additional training, Canadian certifications, or strategically navigated survival employment as a pathway to future opportunities. However, participants emphasized that resilience alone cannot substitute for systemic reform, as individual determination cannot overcome structural exclusion. True workplace inclusion requires comprehensive transformation across policy, organizational practice, and community engagement. This includes harmonizing and streamlining credential recognition, shifting to competency-based hiring practices, embedding anti-Black racism strategies, and implementing mentorship and sponsorship programs. Equally critical are inclusive hiring practices, ongoing equity audits, and culturally responsive leadership development initiatives that ensure both accountability and meaningful opportunities for career progression.

The study's findings have significant implications for both policy and practice. Coordinated, multi-level interventions are required to dismantle systemic barriers while promoting equitable employment outcomes, economic growth, and social justice. Future research should examine longitudinal outcomes, including career progression, income parity, and psychosocial well-being, as well as the effectiveness of policy reforms, mentorship initiatives, and bridging programs. While the study focuses on a specific northern context, the themes resonate with broader national and international research on immigrant labor market integration and racialized inequities. Ultimately, achieving workplace inclusion for Black immigrant youth in the NWT and similar northern contexts requires ongoing collaboration between governments, employers, academic institutions, and immigrant-serving organizations. By centering lived

experience in the design and implementation of policies and programs, stakeholders can create labor market conditions that are equitable, culturally responsive, and sustainable, enabling Black immigrants to contribute fully to regional economic development and social resilience.

Introduction

Equitable participation in the Canadian labor market remains a pressing priority, particularly as racialized immigrant populations continue to grow across the country. Within northern and remote jurisdictions such as the Northwest Territories (NWT), these concerns take on added urgency due to unique structural, demographic, and economic realities. Black immigrant youth in the NWT face challenges that intersect race, migration status, geography, and limited institutional supports, resulting in persistent barriers to achieving meaningful employment outcomes. While conversations on diversity, inclusion, and reconciliation are advancing across Canada, the experiences of Black immigrant youth in the North remain insufficiently examined, leaving a significant gap in research, policy, and practice. This study responds directly to that gap by generating new, context-specific evidence on the systemic barriers and opportunities shaping labor market outcomes for this population.

The relevance of this work aligns with ongoing national debates about credential recognition, equitable hiring, anti-racism, and the future of work, while contributing insight to regional efforts aimed at strengthening community well-being and economic participation. Locally, Black immigrant youth navigate constrained professional networks, systemic credential biases, and limited workplace supports. Regionally, the broader northern labor market faces recruitment and retention challenges that could be mitigated by better leveraging the diverse skills and experiences of racialized immigrants. Nationally, persistent inequities in employment outcomes for Black Canadians, documented across multiple studies and policy reports, signal the need for targeted interventions that reflect varied provincial and territorial realities. Against this backdrop, the present study offers timely and significant contributions to knowledge and practice.

Guided by these considerations, the research addressed four central questions:

1. What systemic barriers in credential recognition and workplace integration hinder equitable labor market outcomes for Black immigrant youth in the NWT?
2. How can employers be engaged to adopt equitable hiring practices, address anti-Black racism, and improve skill recognition processes?
3. What strategies effectively promote inclusive workplaces and better employment outcomes for Black youth, and how can these approaches be scaled across diverse contexts? and
4. How can decent work and economic growth be promoted among Black immigrant youth to reduce employment inequities, advancing Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 10?

These questions shaped the research design and analytical approach, ensuring strong alignment between identified knowledge gaps, community concerns, and the Future Skills Centre's (FSC) strategic priorities. The study's findings hold relevance for multiple audiences, including policymakers, employers, community organizations, and northern institutions seeking evidence-informed strategies to improve workplace inclusion. The insights generated illuminate the lived realities and systemic challenges encountered by Black immigrant youth and the broader implications for organizational practices, regional economic development, and labor market planning. The recommendations emerging from the research respond directly to FSC's strategic questions by identifying promising practices, systemic constraints, and opportunities for future skills development that can enhance equity and inclusion within the northern workforce.

This report is structured to provide a clear, coherent, and accessible account of the study and its implications. The literature review section outlines the broader dynamics shaping the experiences of Black immigrant youth, including the state of credential recognition, anti-Black

racism in employment, and the specific labor market characteristics of the NWT. The research design section details the mixed-methods approach, including the survey of Black immigrant youth, photovoice methodology, and focus group discussions. The findings section presents the key themes, demonstrating how structural barriers, employer practices, and workplace cultures affect employment outcomes. The implications and future direction section connects these findings to practice and policy, highlighting concrete actions for employers, government bodies, and community organizations. It also identifies areas for continued research, partnerships, and innovation to support more inclusive and equitable labor market outcomes for Black immigrant youth in the NWT.

Literature Review

Immigrant labor market integration remains a defining issue within Canada's skills ecosystem, particularly as the country continues to rely on skilled immigration to address demographic shifts, workforce shortages, and economic growth. Although federal and provincial immigration pathways, including Express Entry and Provincial Nomination Programs, prioritize highly educated and professionally experienced applicants, persistent inequities prevent many immigrants from accessing employment aligned with their qualifications. These challenges are especially pronounced for racialized groups, with Black immigrants facing significant barriers that reflect broader systemic inequities in Canadian society. Research consistently demonstrates that despite their strong educational backgrounds and professional histories, Black immigrants encounter disproportionately high levels of unemployment, underemployment, and occupational mismatch, revealing deep-seated issues related to racism, policy structures, and workplace practices (Nichols et al., 2020; Oluwadele, 2021, 2022a).

These barriers emerge through both structural and interpersonal mechanisms that shape immigrants' employment trajectories. Structural challenges include the devaluation of international credentials, institutionalized discrimination, and employment policies that inadvertently disadvantage racialized immigrants. Interpersonal dynamics such as microaggressions, stereotyping, tokenism, and exclusion from informal networks, further erode immigrants' sense of belonging and limit their access to meaningful career advancement (Zaami & Madibbo, 2021). These forms of exclusion collectively contribute to a cycle in which Black immigrants are unable to fully participate in or benefit from Canada's labor market, despite policy narratives that promote diversity and economic inclusion.

A central barrier highlighted across the literature is the non-recognition or devaluation of foreign credentials. Skilled immigrants often arrive with qualifications that match or exceed Canadian standards, yet they encounter opaque, lengthy, and costly re-credentialing processes. Zaqout (2024) showed that racialized skilled immigrants in British Columbia regularly struggle to access professional employment because employers undervalue international education, especially when obtained outside Western countries. The result is not only economic loss but also psychological harm, as immigrants' professional identities are undermined through repeated dismissal of their expertise. Amoako et al. (2024) found that Black African immigrant women in Ontario reported feeling that their professional histories were erased when their qualifications were dismissed, reinforcing broader inequities and pushing many into survival jobs far below their capacity.

The insistence on “Canadian work experience” functions as an additional barrier that prevents many immigrants from securing employment commensurate with their skills. This requirement, widely critiqued across the literature, creates an exclusionary cycle: *immigrants cannot obtain Canadian experience without being hired, yet they cannot be hired without Canadian experience*. Studies have identified this practice as discriminatory, particularly toward racialized immigrants whose international experience is often undervalued (Wilson-Forsberg et al., 2019; Zaami & Madibbo, 2021). For Black immigrants, this requirement intersects with racial bias, accent discrimination, and employer assumptions about competence, further narrowing pathways into professional roles (Akinlade et al., 2020). These dynamics reinforce systemic inequities embedded within hiring practices and limit the broader labor market's ability to benefit from diverse skills and perspectives.

Workplace discrimination and anti-Black racism further shape the employment experiences of Black immigrants. Research indicates that Black workers are particularly vulnerable to exclusion, limited promotion opportunities, wage disparities, and negative stereotyping in professional environments (Oluwadele, 2021). Even within organizations that publicly embrace diversity, subtle but persistent forms of discrimination, such as microaggressions, cultural invalidation, and pressure to assimilate, continue to undermine inclusion. Anti-Black racism remains insufficiently addressed in many Canadian workplaces, and the literature highlights how perceptions of incompetence associated with *Blackness* hinder equitable access to career mobility (Amoako et al., 2024). These discriminatory experiences undermine individual well-being and reflect broader structural issues within Canada's skills ecosystem, where diversity policies often fail to address racialized inequalities in practice.

The Northwest Territories offers a unique and understudied context for understanding these dynamics. The territory's labor market is relatively small and heavily influenced by government employment. While the Indigenous Employment Policy plays a crucial role in advancing reconciliation and addressing historical injustices, it also has unintended effects on other racialized groups, particularly Black immigrants who may be deprioritized in hiring processes. Zhang et al. (2022) cautioned that equity policies designed for one group can inadvertently marginalize others when implemented without an intersectional lens. For Black immigrants in the NWT, this policy environment combined with existing challenges related to credential recognition and racial discrimination creates a particularly complex landscape for labor market integration.

Workplace belonging and organizational culture further influence immigrants' ability to integrate and advance. Inclusion involves more than diversity; it requires feeling valued,

respected, and able to influence workplace decisions (Ferdman, 2013). However, studies reveal a disconnect between organizational perceptions and immigrant workers' experiences. Managers may view their workplaces as welcoming, while racialized employees report feeling undervalued or excluded (Séguin et al., 2024). For Black immigrants, environments that prioritize assimilation over genuine inclusion exacerbate feelings of alienation and reduce opportunities for professional thriving.

Despite these challenges, immigrants continue to demonstrate resilience through strategies such as pursuing additional education, re-certification, and navigating multiple jobs while seeking alignment with their skills (Nichols et al., 2020). Yet as Farmanesh et al. (2020) warned, diversity efforts are insufficient unless systemic barriers are dismantled, and without structural reform, immigrant resilience risks being overshadowed by persistent inequality. Although substantial literature examines immigrant integration in major provinces, there is limited research on Black immigrants' experiences in smaller and northern regions. The Northwest Territories remains largely absent from national conversations on racial equity and skills development. Moreover, few studies employ participatory approaches such as photovoice, which provide deeper insight into lived experiences. This research contributes to filling these gaps by documenting the experiences of Black immigrants in the NWT and offering evidence-based insights to inform policy, practice, and future labor market strategies.

Research Design

This project employed a mixed-methods research design to examine the employment experiences of Black immigrants in the Northwest Territories. This design was selected to address research questions that are primarily exploratory and descriptive in nature, focusing on how Black immigrants access employment, the barriers they encounter, and the systemic conditions influencing workplace inclusion. The mixed-methods approach enabled the project to capture both the measurable patterns in employment access and the deeper narratives that describe lived realities. The participatory orientation ensured that community members were not positioned merely as research subjects but as partners in shaping the study, thereby strengthening cultural relevance, community trust, and the validity of findings. This was especially important in the context of Canada's North, where smaller labor markets and the unique experiences of racialized immigrants call for approaches that integrate equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout the research process.

The *quantitative component* consisted of an online survey administered through Microsoft Forms. This survey was designed to generate data on employment access, credential recognition, and experiences of inclusion or exclusion within workplaces. Fifty-seven Black immigrants living in the NWT completed the survey. The target population consisted of individuals aged 18 years and older who were employed. Survey questions focused on challenges securing employment aligned with skills and qualifications, perceptions of how international credentials and experience were evaluated, and experiences of discrimination, mentorship, career advancement, and workplace belonging. Descriptive statistics were used to identify emerging patterns across the sample. While not intended to support causal inference or generalizable

conclusions, the quantitative data provided a valuable overview of the prevalence and distribution of employment barriers, informing the qualitative phases that followed.

The *qualitative component* consisted of both photovoice and focus groups, approaches chosen for their capacity to illuminate complex emotional, symbolic, and social dimensions of participants' experiences. Photovoice offered an innovative method well suited to documenting the lived realities of racialized communities, enabling participants to express experiences that may not surface in traditional interviews or surveys. Twelve participants took part in the photovoice phase, all self-identified Black immigrants living and working in the NWT. Recruitment for this phase was supported by a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) consisting of local Black immigrant leaders, professionals, and community stakeholders. The CAC ensured that recruitment strategies were culturally appropriate and strengthened trust between the research team and the community. The sample size aligned with best practices in photovoice research, which prioritize depth and narrative richness over quantitative representation (Seitz & Orsini, 2022).

Participants received a two-day training workshop covering the ethical foundations of photovoice, technical photography skills, and narrative development using the SHOWeD framework. This framework encouraged participants to reflect on what they saw, what was happening, how it related to their lives, why the situation existed, and what could be done about it. Participants were asked to take photos representing challenges, aspirations, or experiences of inclusion within their employment journeys. To protect anonymity and maintain ethical integrity, they were instructed not to photograph identifiable individuals or workplaces. Each image was accompanied by a written reflection. The visual and narrative accounts provided deep insight

into themes such as resilience, conditional belonging, systemic exclusion, and the pursuit of opportunity.

To complement the photovoice findings, two virtual focus groups were conducted with a total of ten participants. These sessions allowed participants to collectively discuss experiences of workplace integration, discrimination, credential recognition, and career progression. The semi-structured discussions, each approximately 60 minutes, were guided by open-ended questions that encouraged reflection on employment trajectories, community engagement, and visions for inclusive workplace change. The focus groups served both as a triangulation strategy and as a forum for co-creating policy and practice recommendations. Themes that emerged aligned closely with survey and photovoice findings, reinforcing the credibility of results across methods.

Data analysis followed a triangulated approach. Quantitative survey data were analyzed descriptively, while photovoice narratives and focus group transcripts underwent thematic analysis using inductive and deductive coding techniques. Two researchers reviewed themes to support analytical rigor and reduce bias. The active involvement of the participants throughout the interpretation process helped validate findings, ensuring the analysis reflected their realities and avoided misrepresentation. Ethical considerations were central throughout the research. All participants provided informed consent, were briefed on confidentiality protocols, and had the right to withdraw at any time. This was especially critical given that participants discussed experiences of racial discrimination, exclusion, and emotional strain. Data was anonymized, securely stored, and used solely for research purposes. The study adhered to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2, 2022) for research involving humans and met the ethical and data

protection standards required by the Future Skills Centre. These ethical frameworks guided the project's commitment to confidentiality, participant dignity, and responsible knowledge sharing.

Findings

This study explored the lived experiences of Black immigrants in the Northwest Territories, focusing on credential recognition, workplace integration, and employment equity. Using a participatory photovoice approach complemented by surveys and focus groups, participants shared their challenges and strategies in navigating the Canadian labor market. The findings reveal a complex interplay of structural, systemic, and attitudinal barriers, compounded by the emotional and economic impacts of underemployment. The following themes integrate participant insights with broader literature to illuminate patterns of exclusion and resilience.

Theme 1: International Qualifications and Credential Devaluation

Credential recognition emerged as a central and deeply personal theme, reflecting longstanding challenges identified in the literature (Amoako et al., 2024; Zaqout, 2024). Participants described experiences of having their degrees and professional certifications questioned, undervalued, or outright dismissed. Credentials from non-Western countries, particularly those from the Caribbean and African nations, were routinely treated with skepticism, reflecting what Bauder (2003) described as *institutionalized discrimination* in credentialing systems. These processes systematically privilege Western qualifications while devaluing those from the Global South, reproducing hierarchies of knowledge and colonial logics.

Photovoice submissions highlighted the symbolic and material dimensions of this devaluation, including images of unused diplomas or framed certificates stored away, representing professional expertise rendered invisible. One participant noted, “*My Caribbean training shaped my teaching philosophy, but here it’s my American degree that gets recognized,*” illustrating how epistemic hierarchies operate even within immigrant populations.

The consequences of credential discounting were multifaceted. Participants described prolonged unemployment, the need for costly re-certification, or acceptance of positions far below their qualifications, aligning with findings in Ontario and other Canadian contexts (Guo, 2009; Nichols et al., 2020). These systemic barriers function not merely as administrative hurdles but as structural gatekeeping mechanisms that reinforce racialized inequities in labor market access.

Theme 2: The Canadian Experience Requirement and Exclusionary Hiring Practices

Alongside credential recognition, the requirement for “Canadian work experience” emerged as a persistent paradox. Participants emphasized that employers routinely rejected candidates with international expertise, citing insufficient Canadian experience, thereby perpetuating a self-reinforcing cycle of exclusion. As noted in prior studies, this requirement reflects the *myth of Canadian exceptionalism* in which domestic work environments are assumed to be inherently unique, rendering foreign experience irrelevant (Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Wilson-Forsberg et al., 2019; Zaami & Madibbo, 2021). Participant narratives illustrate the emotional weight of this paradox. One described the shock of having extensive legal and professional experience dismissed solely because it was acquired outside Canada. Another participant said, *“Employers’ insistence on local experience communicates an assumption that professional skills and competencies developed abroad are inferior, irrelevant, or untransferable to the Canadian context.”* Another also noted the frustration of being actively recruited for skills through immigration programs, only to be relegated to menial jobs upon arrival, echoing broader critiques of Canada’s economic immigration system (Asey, 2022).

This gatekeeping mechanism delays career progression and also normalizes a deficit view of immigrants, positioning them as perpetual learners or “unproven” workers, regardless of their

global accomplishments. This Canadian experience requirement functions as a racialized filter, disproportionately disadvantaging Black immigrants, particularly those without established Canadian networks. Addressing this barrier requires a shift toward competency-based hiring models that prioritize demonstrated skills over geography of experience, alongside employer education on cross-cultural equivalencies in professional standards.

Theme 3: Policy-Driven Exclusion and Intersectional Inequities

Participants consistently highlighted the role of territorial policy, particularly the Indigenous Employment Policy (IEP), in shaping labor market outcomes. While the policy is crucial for promoting Indigenous employment and addressing historical injustices, participants reported feeling systematically excluded from government positions, the largest source of stable employment in the NWT. One focus group participant noted, “*We are all fighting for space in a system that was not designed with us in mind.*” The insight here is not oppositional but relational: equitable employment policy must advance Indigenous priorities while also addressing systemic anti-Black racism and immigrant exclusion.

This observation aligns with intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991), which argues that policies must account for overlapping forms of marginalization. Without this lens, initiatives designed to correct one form of exclusion, anti-Indigenous inequities, can inadvertently reinforce another, such as anti-Black racism. Literature on Canadian labor equity further highlights that racialized immigrant populations are frequently overlooked in policy frameworks, leaving them vulnerable to systemic exclusion (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Zhang et al., 2022).

Participants’ experiences illustrate how even well-intentioned policies can have unintended consequences when they fail to account for diverse realities. This finding underscores

the need for multi-layered inclusion frameworks that reconcile the priorities of different marginalized groups without perpetuating hierarchies of deservingness.

Theme 4: Underemployment and Its Emotional and Economic Toll

The cumulative impact of credential devaluation, Canadian experience requirements, and policy-driven exclusion manifested in widespread underemployment. Participants reported being employed in survival jobs, such as warehouse labor, housekeeping, or other precarious roles, despite holding advanced degrees and years of professional experience. This downward occupational mobility reflects a pattern wherein immigrants, especially racialized ones, are often forced into low-paying roles that neither reflect nor fully utilize their skills. The consequences are multifaceted: economic losses for individuals and families, skill underutilization in the labor market, and emotional tolls associated with professional stagnation.

These experiences align with research on immigrant deskilling in Canada (Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Nichols et al., 2020). Underemployment was accompanied by significant emotional and psychosocial burdens. Participants described feelings of frustration, disappointment, and diminished self-worth, highlighting the toll of repeated rejection and professional marginalization. One of the focus group participants reflected that immigrants arrive “*full of hope*” only to find their “*dreams crushed*,” exemplifying the disillusionment reported in other studies of Black immigrant women in Ontario (Amoako et al., 2024).

Beyond individual impacts, underemployment has broader societal implications. The underutilization of skilled immigrants reduces organizational performance, limits workplace diversity, and incurs economic costs for governments (Farmanesh et al., 2020). These findings underscore the inefficiency and inequity of current labor market structures in the NWT, which fail to leverage the skills and expertise of highly trained newcomers.

Theme 5: Resilience, Adaptation, and the Limits of Survival Strategies

Despite systemic barriers, participants demonstrated notable resilience and adaptability. Many pursued additional training, Canadian certifications, or strategically reframed survival employment as a pathway to future opportunities. For instance, one participant's pursuit of a Certified Government Auditing Professional designation reflects the strategic agency employed by immigrants to navigate exclusionary systems. These strategies align with literature on immigrant "survival tactics," which highlight persistence, creativity, and agency in the face of systemic challenges (Nichols et al., 2020).

However, participants emphasized that resilience has limits. Celebrating individual adaptation without addressing structural inequities risks normalizing systemic failure, thus, shifting the burden of integration onto immigrants themselves (Dei, 2008). One participant articulated this tension, stating, *"Many skilled immigrants come ready to contribute but what they get is constant fighting – we constantly have to push, work twice as hard to show our worth, and stay strong. Believe me, this is exhausting."* Another remarked, *"We are resilient because we have no choice. What we need is not resilience, it is opportunity."* Several other participants emphasized that their perseverance should not absolve institutions of responsibility. Resilience, while laudable, should not be interpreted as evidence of successful inclusion but as a coping mechanism necessitated by systemic exclusion. The research participants' statement encapsulates the core message of this study: *individual determination must be matched by institutional transformation*. True inclusion cannot rely on the adaptability of marginalized individuals alone; it requires a restructuring of systems to ensure equitable access, fair recognition, and meaningful participation for all.

The lived experiences of Black immigrants in the NWT reveal that workplace exclusion is structural, systemic, and embedded within institutional norms. Credential devaluation, exclusionary hiring practices, and policy-driven inequities collectively produce underemployment, deskilling, and psychosocial strain. Participants' resilience highlights both the creativity and determination of immigrants and the limitations of individual coping in the absence of systemic reform. Achieving genuine inclusion in the NWT labor market requires a multi-pronged approach: equity-centered policy, competency-based hiring practices, informed employer education, and community-led collaboration. Only by addressing these structural barriers can the territory cultivate a labor market that values diversity as a foundation for shared growth, innovation, and social justice, rather than as rhetoric alone.

Implications and Future Directions

This study set out to explore the lived experiences of Black immigrants in the Northwest Territories (NWT), with a focus on credential recognition, workplace integration, and employment equity. The findings reveal systemic barriers, including credential devaluation, Canadian experience requirements, policy-driven exclusion, and underemployment, that shape labor market outcomes. Participants' narratives underscore the emotional and professional toll of these barriers, while also highlighting resilience strategies employed to navigate systemic inequities. The insights generated have several implications for policy, practice, and future research, and contribute to understanding how northern labor markets can better support inclusion.

Policy Implications

The study underscores the urgent need for policy reforms that address both structural inequities and intersectional considerations. Credential recognition remains a critical barrier, as

participants' internationally acquired qualifications were often discounted or undervalued, limiting access to meaningful employment. Harmonizing and streamlining credential evaluation processes across federal, territorial, and professional regulatory bodies is essential to ensure transparency, reduce delays, and acknowledge global equivalencies. Policies should also fund bridging programs that integrate internationally trained professionals into the workforce without requiring redundant retraining.

The Canadian experience requirement emerged as a significant exclusionary mechanism, systematically disadvantaging Black immigrants. Legislative reforms that shift toward competency-based hiring, coupled with employer accountability measures, are needed to evaluate candidates based on demonstrated skills rather than the geographic origin of experience. These reforms align with international best practices and contribute to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Furthermore, territorial policies, such as the Indigenous Employment Policy, while vital for addressing historical inequities, highlight the importance of adopting intersectional frameworks in labor market governance. Policies should balance Indigenous employment priorities with broader inclusion objectives for other marginalized groups, including Black immigrants, ensuring that equity initiatives do not unintentionally perpetuate exclusion. Embedding anti-Black racism strategies within labor market and employment frameworks, alongside mandatory anti-racism training, equity audits, and transparent reporting, can reinforce accountability and systemic change.

Practice and Institutional Implications

At the organizational level, employers and institutions have a central role in fostering inclusive workplaces. Developing a Northern Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategy that reflects local demographic realities can help address barriers specific to Black immigrants while establishing measurable equity outcomes across sectors. Mentorship and sponsorship networks are essential for professional integration, offering culturally responsive guidance, advocacy, and opportunities for leadership development.

Inclusive hiring practices including blind recruitment, diverse hiring panels, equity-based targets, and ongoing workplace inclusion audits can help mitigate bias and enhance workforce diversity. Embedding anti-racism education into human resources and leadership development programs is critical for shifting organizational culture, promoting equitable performance evaluations, and ensuring safe mechanisms for reporting discrimination. Bridging and career development programs, co-designed with employers, immigrant-serving agencies, and post-secondary institutions, offer targeted pathways for skill validation, internships, and professional growth, allowing immigrants to leverage prior experience while integrating into the Canadian labor market.

Implications for Research and Future Directions

While this study provides insights into the experiences of Black immigrants in the NWT, it also highlights areas for further investigation. Future research could examine longitudinal outcomes of Black immigrants' labor market integration, including career progression, income parity, and psychosocial well-being. Comparative studies across northern and southern regions of Canada would help identify context-specific barriers and best practices. Additionally, evaluating

the effectiveness of policy interventions, mentorship programs, and bridging initiatives will be crucial to understanding what strategies most effectively promote workplace inclusion.

Limitations of this study, including the focus on a relatively small population and a single territorial context, suggest caution in generalizing findings; however, the themes resonate with national and international literature on immigrant labor market integration and racialized inequities. Continued collaboration between policymakers, employers, academic researchers, and immigrant communities is essential to generate actionable solutions informed by lived experience.

Conclusion

The study confirms that workplace exclusion in the NWT is structural, systemic, and intersectional. Black immigrants encounter multiple, overlapping barriers that inhibit professional recognition, access to decent work, and career advancement. The findings contribute evidence to FSC's strategic questions regarding inclusion, equity, and workforce optimization, demonstrating that systemic reforms are required to leverage immigrant talent fully.

Moving forward, achieving meaningful workplace inclusion will require coordinated interventions at policy, institutional, and community levels. Multi-stakeholder collaboration including governments, employers, and immigrant-serving organizations must focus on reforming credential recognition, eliminating discriminatory experience requirements, embedding equity frameworks, and establishing mentorship pathways. These actions not only promote social justice but also enhance economic growth, organizational effectiveness, and territorial resilience.

Ultimately, the study emphasizes that individual resilience, while admirable, cannot substitute for systemic transformation. Future work should continue to center the voices of Black

immigrants in co-creating solutions, ensuring that labor market policies and practices are evidence-informed, culturally responsive, and sustainable.

Biographies

Dr. Henry Dimingu

Dr. Dimingu is the Executive Director and Co-Founder of ProEdge Consulting Group Ltd. and an Assistant Professor of Accounting at the University of Prince Edward Island. His research and practice focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion, with a particular emphasis on immigrant workforce integration and corporate governance. Committed to fostering inclusive workplaces, he champions pathways for newcomers to enhance skills and advance professionally. As lead on this research project, Dr. Dimingu coordinated all aspects of the study, including designing and facilitating focus group sessions, ensuring methodological rigor, and integrating community perspectives into actionable findings. His work bridges scholarship and practice, generating evidence-based strategies to promote equitable labor market outcomes and organizational inclusion.

Dr. Idowu Mary Mogaji

Dr. Mogaji is the Director and Co-Founder of ProEdge Consulting Group Ltd., co-lead on this research project, and Assistant Provost, Academic Quality and Strategic Enhancement at the University of Fredericton. She brings extensive experience in higher education, specializing in curriculum innovation, quality assurance, academic policy development, and institutional transformation. Her research focuses on equity, diversity, and inclusion, leadership, policy, and the Sustainable Development Goals. On this project, Dr. Mogaji designed the research protocol and collaborated on data analysis with the research assistants. She is a committed advocate for education as a catalyst for social equity and inclusive practice.

Fiona Opoku-Mensah

Fiona served as a research assistant on this project and has over five years of experience in academic research, policy analysis, program coordination, and stakeholder engagement. She is a passionate researcher committed to social impact, equity, and evidence-based policy solutions. Fiona is skilled in both qualitative and quantitative research methods, facilitating community programs, and implementing initiatives that support marginalized populations. She holds a Master of Arts in Sociology from the University of Saskatchewan and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Sociology from the University of Ghana. On this project, Fiona contributed to the literature review, data collection, and analysis, ensuring rigor and inclusivity in capturing the experiences of Black immigrant youth in the Northwest Territories.

Dr Abukari Kwame

Dr. Kwame served as a research assistant and led the photovoice component of this project, including the design, facilitation, and analysis of the visual narratives. With a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Studies from the University of Saskatchewan and dual MPhil degrees in English Linguistics and Indigenous Studies from The Arctic University of Norway, he brings deep expertise in qualitative research, multilingualism, and culturally responsive methodologies. Dr. Kwame has teaching experience in Canada and Ghana, covering courses on ethnicity, race, and professional practice, alongside curriculum development and student mentorship. His skills in data analysis, report writing, and stakeholder engagement were instrumental in capturing and interpreting the lived experiences of Black immigrant youth in the Northwest Territories.

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