

WCG National Employment Index 2021

Alberta Spotlight





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WCG Services: leading the way in sustainable employment

WCG Services is an industry leader in developing and delivering employment and vocational rehabilitation services across Canada.

For more than 25 years WCG has been partnering with governments and local service delivery organizations to create sustainable employment opportunities for people, businesses, and communities.

Every day we help people reach their employment goals and improve the quality of their lives - many of them with multiple, complex barriers to entering or re-entering the workforce. Our participants include persons with disabilities, Indigenous people, youth, Veterans, and other demographic groups underrepresented in the labour market.

WCG is part of the [APM Group](#), which delivers employment and allied health services internationally. Our global network of companies shares a core purpose: to enable better lives.

In the last 12 months, our team of 6,650 people in 10 countries have reached the lives of more than 1 million people.

WCG commissioned independent market research consultancy, CoreData, to conduct research on diversity and inclusivity in the workplace. The result is the WCG National Employment Index and three spotlight reports on Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario.

A landmark piece of research, the Index sought to create a benchmark against which to measure and track over time the employment and career access, equity and inclusion in the workforce.

The research findings mark an inaugural waypost for businesses and job seekers to navigate and progress towards equitable employment.

The global pandemic has accelerated change

The pandemic has accelerated workplace trends to dramatically increase remote work, automation and the need for greater digital and technological skill. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) *Preparing for the Future of Work in Canada* makes it clear this greater rate of change could exacerbate economic and social inequality.

The OECD's report, *Skill measures to mobilise the workforce during the COVID-19 crisis*, outlines the crucial role of ensuring displaced workers are rapidly retrained for areas of high demand. It details the importance of services to retrain and redeploy displaced workers and says governments will need to increase their investment in adult training as well as making targeted efforts to reach at risk groups. "Aligning retraining efforts with labour market needs is critical," it says.

WCG National Employment Index

About the Index

WCG Services commissioned independent market research consultancy, CoreData, to develop and establish a National Employment Index. The index assesses the equity of employment opportunities for unemployed Canadians, and the proactive steps being taken by both job seekers and employers to improve employment outcomes.

The Index assesses three main areas: attitudes, access and actions.

Attitudes	Access	Actions
<p>measures whether the mindsets of employers and job seekers are strengthening employment outcomes. It includes:</p> <p>1.1 Employability: Employer perceptions of the employability of groups typically underrepresented in the workforce and individuals' perceptions of their own employability</p> <p>1.2 Equity: Employer perceptions of the employability of groups typically underrepresented in the workforce and individuals' perceptions of their own employability</p> <p>1.3 Myths: Prevalence of negative attitudes and employer misperceptions.</p>	<p>measures the accessibility of meaningful employment outcomes. It includes:</p> <p>2.1 Awareness: Whether individuals know where to go for assistance finding a job and whether employers know where to go for help recruiting underrepresented groups</p> <p>2.2 Availability: Whether individuals have the support needed to find work and employers have the support needed to recruit and retain people from underrepresented groups</p> <p>2.3 Capability: Job seekers' existing skills and knowledge and employers' organizational capability to recruit people from typically underrepresented groups</p>	<p>measures the tangible actions and interventions that are influencing employment outcomes. It includes:</p> <p>3.1 Services: Employers' and individuals' ease of accessing employment services to assist with recruitment, retention and finding work and relevance of services</p> <p>3.2 System: Employers' and individuals' understanding of how to access these supports within the current system</p> <p>3.3 Activity: Actions taken or planned by job seekers to increase their employability and by employers to recruit and retain job seekers</p>

The Index was developed from quantitative surveys conducted in May 2021 of 1,236 employers involved in recruitment and 1,159 Canadians who had been actively seeking work within the last 12 months*.

While the sample of individuals included both employed and unemployed respondents, the Index results are based only on the responses of those currently unemployed.

Throughout the report, we use the term "people who represent groups that are typically underrepresented in the workforce", abbreviated thereafter to "underrepresented groups". For the purposes of this research, this includes people who are, or identify as:

- Indigenous
- Visible minorities
- People with a disability or chronic physical and/or mental health conditions
- Those with limited work experience
- Recent immigrants to Canada
- People previously incarcerated/with a criminal record
- Homeless or without stable, secure accommodation
- Survivors of violence or abuse
- Youth (under 25)
- People who identify as part of the LGBTQ2+ community
- Those who have experienced periods of involuntary long-term unemployment

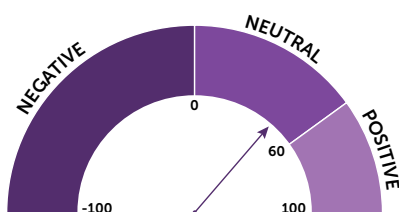
*Referred to throughout the report as 'job seekers'



2021 National Employment Index Scorecard

2021 Index Scorecard (average of attitudes, access and actions)

40.4 / 100



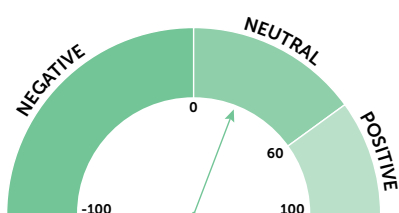
This score is in the neutral-to-negative range and suggests there is strong room for improvement.

This inaugural National Employment Index is designed to understand the employment landscape in Canada from the perspective of both unemployed Canadians and employers. It tracks the challenges and issues they face, job seekers' steps to become employed and employers' steps to recruit and retain people from groups typically underrepresented in the workforce.

The Index and sub-component scores can range from -100 to +100 as they track both positive and negative factors.

Attitudes

28.9 / 100



Overall, employers have a neutral perception of the employability of those typically underrepresented in the workforce, as do unemployed Canadians from these groups. However, there is wide variation in the perceived employability of people with specific characteristics, with some viewed as far less employable by businesses.

Notably, employers perceive greater employment equity for these groups than job seekers themselves. However, the main source of downward pressure on this Index component is widespread myths and misperceptions about underrepresented groups, observed and experienced by both employers and individuals.

Components



Employability



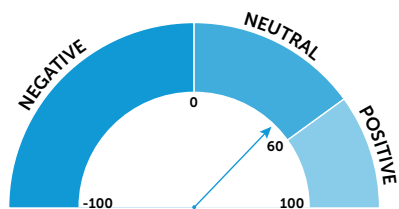
Equity



Myths

Access

54.1 / 100



The best performing Index component, Access is driven up by positive perceptions of capability among both employers and unemployed Canadians. The downward pressure stems from a lack of awareness of available supports, and sense on both sides that more support is required to facilitate successful employment and retention of employment for people from groups underrepresented in the Canadian workforce.

Components



Awareness



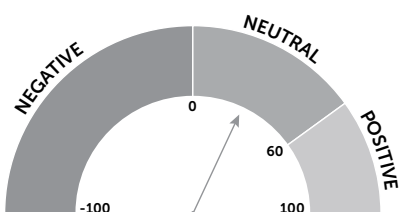
Availability



Capability

Actions

38.3 / 100



Most Canadian employers are actively recruiting at least one underrepresented group. However, recruitment efforts target these groups disproportionately. System complexity is hampering success and pulling this Index measure into negative territory. Specifically, the majority of businesses do not find it easy to access services and supports, and some believe the services provided are not relevant to their needs. For unemployed Canadians the situation is even worse, but the overwhelming majority still taking active steps to find employment on their own without any additional support.

Components



Services



System



Activity



Overall 2021 Index Score

40.4/100

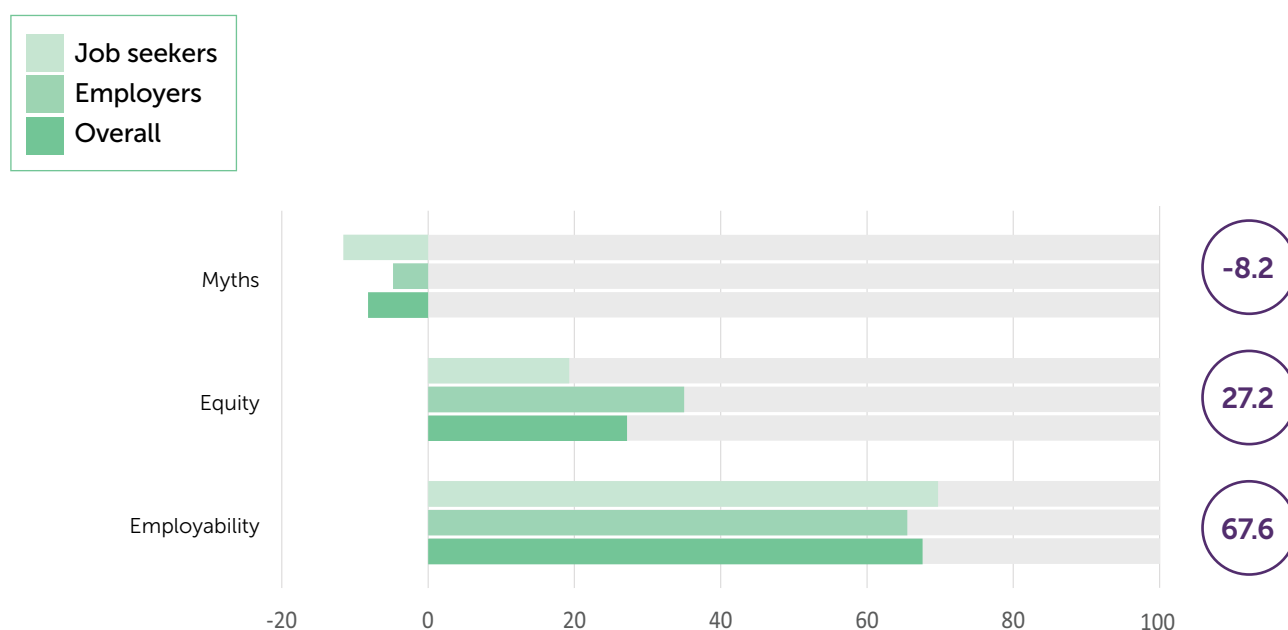
This score is in the neutral-to-negative range and suggests there is strong room for improvement.

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The Index and sub-component scores can range from -100 to +100 as they track both positive and negative factors.

Overall, employers have a neutral perception of the employability of those typically underrepresented in the workforce, as do unemployed Canadians from these groups. However, there is wide variation in the perceived employability of people with specific characteristics, with some viewed as far less employable by businesses.

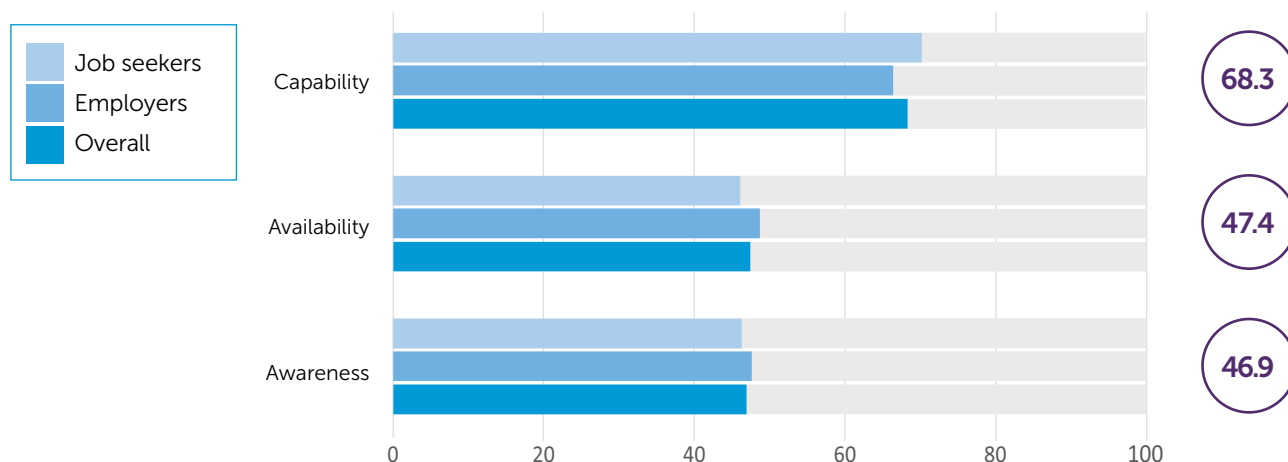
Notably, employers perceive greater employment equity for these groups than job seekers themselves. However, the main source of downward pressure on this Index component is widespread myths and misperceptions about underrepresented groups, observed and experienced by both employers and individuals.



Key Research Findings

- Employers have neutral perceptions of the employability of groups typically underrepresented in the workforce
- Fewer than three in 10 (28.9 per cent) employers consider those who were previously incarcerated to be employable (based on a 7-10 rating). This improves slightly to two in five (44.1 per cent) for people living with a disability
- In contrast, three in five (61.4 per cent) Canadians from underrepresented groups perceive themselves as employable, however they are less likely to perceive themselves as employable as those not from underrepresented groups (74.2 per cent)
- Individuals from underrepresented groups are less likely to believe Canadian employers are willing to provide employment opportunities to people like themselves (53.3 per cent) than employers (62.8 per cent)
- Almost two in three employers (64.5 per cent) have encountered negative attitudes and misperceptions about underrepresented groups among their peers. This negativity has been experienced by nearly three quarters (73.2 per cent) of individuals from these groups, with the number climbing to nearly four in five among people with a disability (78.2 per cent)
- These misperceptions and negative attitudes are impacting individuals from underrepresented groups when they are searching for work. Most noticeably, their self-esteem (59.2 per cent) and wellbeing, leaving 45.4 per cent feeling miserable and 44.5 per cent isolated

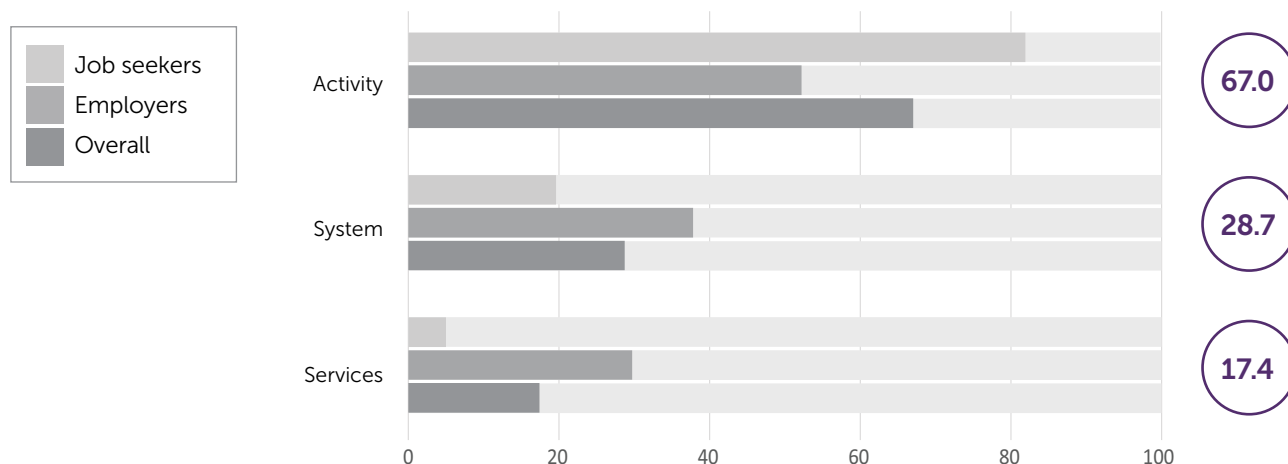
The best performing Index component, Access is driven up by positive perceptions of capability among both employers and unemployed Canadians. The downward pressure stems from a lack of awareness of available supports, and sense on both sides that more support is required to facilitate successful employment and retention of employment for people from groups underrepresented in the Canadian workforce.



Key Research Findings

- Employers rate their ability to recruit and retain employees typically underrepresented in the workforce lower than their overall recruitment and retention capabilities
- While nearly three quarters of employers (70 per cent) believe they have good capability to recruit new employees, two thirds (65.9 per cent) believe they have good capability to retain new hires, this falls to 54 per cent and 56.2 per cent respectively for those underrepresented in the workforce
- More than three in five (63.6 per cent) unemployed Canadians from underrepresented groups believe they have the skills and knowledge required for the job they are seeking
- However, less than half of unemployed individuals from underrepresented groups (46.4 per cent) and employers (47.6 per cent) are confident they know where to seek assistance finding a job/ help recruiting people from groups typically underrepresented in the workforce
- Only one in five employers say they have all the support needed to recruit (22.8 per cent) and retain (22.3 per cent) groups typically underrepresented in the workforce. Similarly, fewer than one in five unemployed Canadians (19.2 per cent) say they have all the support they need to find and maintain employment

Most Canadian employers are actively recruiting at least one underrepresented group. However, recruitment efforts target these groups disproportionately. System complexity is hampering success and pulling this Index measure into negative territory. Specifically, the majority of businesses do not find it easy to access services and supports, and some believe the services provided are not relevant to their needs. For unemployed Canadians the situation is even worse, but the overwhelming majority still taking active steps to find employment on their own without any additional support.



Key Research Findings

- Only half of Canadian employers (52.5 per cent) and less than two in five unemployed Canadians (36.9 per cent) find it easy to access recruitment and retention support, and job seeking and retention support respectively
- While half of Canadian employers (53.6 per cent) believe employment services are relevant to their needs, unemployed Canadians are less likely to view services as relevant (34.2 per cent)
- 69.8% employers are actively recruiting from at least one underrepresented group. However, their levels of focus evidently differ:
 - Youth under 25 years - 42.3 per cent
 - People with limited work experience - 42.1 per cent
 - Visible minorities - 39.4 per cent
 - Indigenous Canadians - 31 per cent
 - People with a disability - 20.4 per cent
 - People previously incarcerated - 10.5 per cent
 - People with no fixed address - 10.2 per cent
- 40.2 per cent of Canadian employers have taken active steps to promote hiring inclusivity and workforce diversity in the last 12 months. Among these employers, some of the most common steps taken were:
 - 49.5 per cent made changes to workplace values and culture
 - 41.2 per cent introduced new role or expanded current diversity and inclusion roles
 - 38.4 per cent engaged with staff from underrepresented groups to guide organizational change
 - 38 per cent provided training for HR staff to build capability
- Despite their challenges, more than two in three (68.3 per cent) unemployed Canadians have taken steps in the last 12 months to increase their chances of getting a job. The most common steps related to active job research and applications, with just one in five (21.3 per cent) seeking help from an employment services provider and even fewer from private recruiters (15.4 per cent).



Alberta Spotlight



Employer misperceptions are hampering progress

Seven in 10 Albertan job seekers have experienced negative attitudes from potential employers.

These negative attitudes related to age, work experience and education. Including the perceptions that older workers are not worth employing, those who have been out of the workforce for six months or more are unemployable and people without a university degree are not employable.

Compared to their national counterparts, Albertan job seekers were more likely to have encountered negative perceptions (70.2 per cent vs. 67.6 per cent).

Negative attitudes towards older workers (44.7 per cent vs 36.5 per cent respectively), the perception that foreign qualifications were not relevant in Canada (19.6 per cent vs 13.9 per cent) and that people without a university degree are not employable (37.4 per cent vs 31.5 per cent) were all more common in Alberta.

“I owned my own business for over a decade, and the pandemic killed it, now being over 50 am having trouble reinventing myself.”

(Female, 57 years old, Alberta, Unemployed)

36.4 per cent of Albertan job seekers in underrepresented groups reported negative attitudes towards people with gaps in their resume, with another 36.4 per cent reporting negative attitudes towards those with a disability, injury or illness.

Further to this, three quarters (75.5 per cent) of people living with a disability - including chronic physical or mental health conditions - encountered the attitude that hiring people with a disability, injury or illness is a burden.

Only 29.2 per cent of employers surveyed had never encountered negative attitudes or misperceptions from colleagues and leaders within their own business or other businesses.

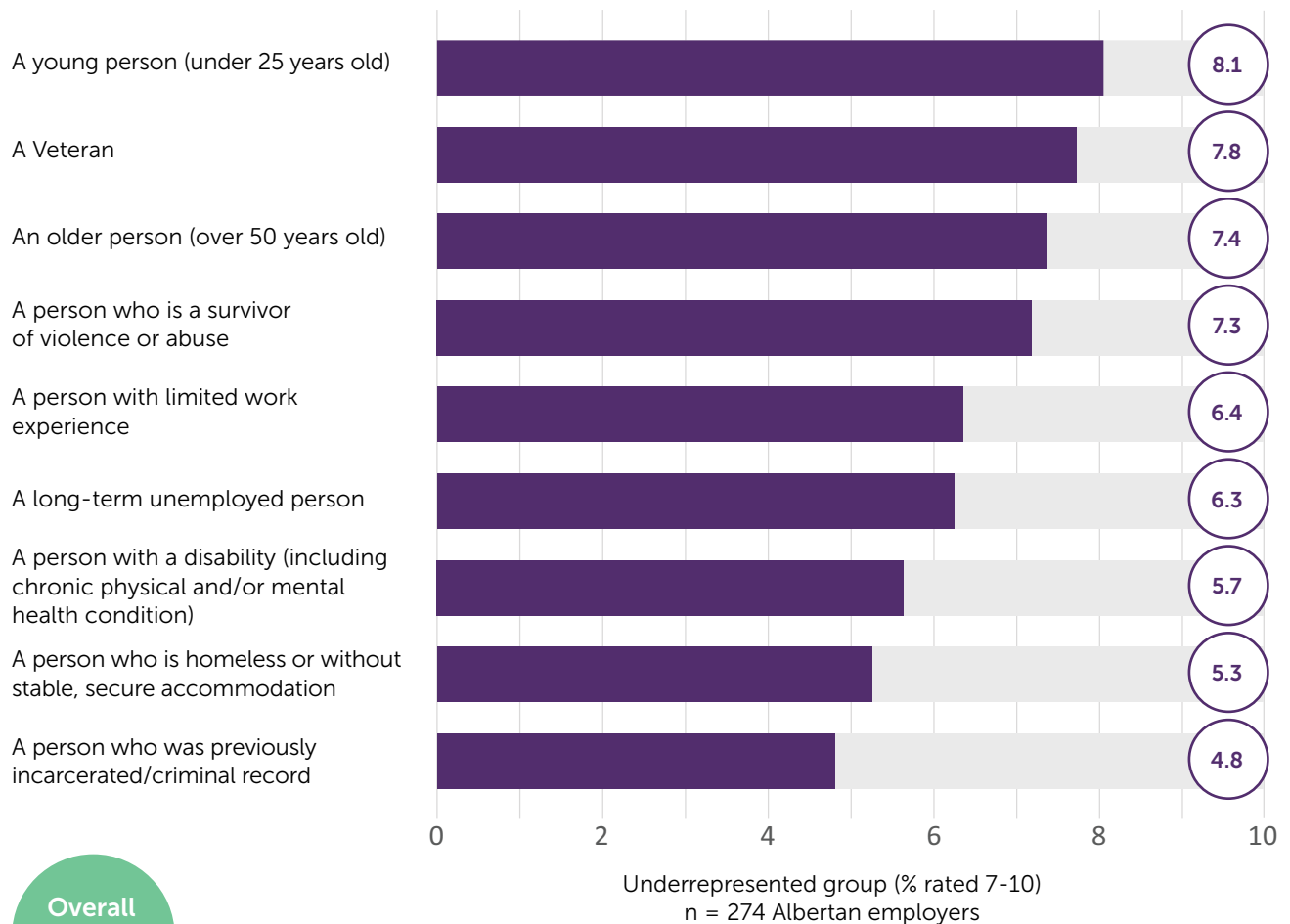
In line with the national average, the most common misconceptions about what makes people from these groups unemployable were:

- Poor or short employment history is a cause for concern - 52.6 per cent
- Older workers thought to be 'too set in their ways' - 42.8 per cent
- Employing someone with a disability, injury or illness is challenging - 42.3 per cent
- The view that hiring people from underrepresented groups will come at a cost to the organization - 21.6 per cent

The perceived employability of underrepresented groups varies.

When asked about the employability of underrepresented job candidates, Albertan employers held neutral to negative views.

In general, how employable do you believe the following potential job applicants are? Please rate their employability on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is extremely employable and 0 is not employable at all



These attitudes and perceptions play out across underrepresented groups in the recruitment efforts of employers:

- Two in five Albertan employers (39.1 per cent) said they are actively recruiting youth (under 25 years old) and those with limited work experience (39.4 per cent)
- Just three in 10 are actively targeting visible minorities (32.1 per cent) and recent immigrants to Canada (29.2 per cent)
- Even fewer are seeking to recruit Indigenous Canadians (28.5 per cent), PWD (20.1 per cent), Veterans (18.2 per cent), and those without a fixed address (12.4 per cent)

"I personally do not have biases with anyone, however when I was an HR rep with other companies the companies would be biased against certain types of people."

(Employer, Male, 42 – 55 years old, Alberta)

Job seekers experiencing negative attitudes from employers face significant wellbeing concerns.

When asked about the impact of negative attitudes on their experience looking for work or working, almost three in five (59.8 per cent) underrepresented Albertan job seekers said it lowered their self-esteem.

Furthermore, two in five said it made them feel isolated (42.5 per cent) and miserable (40.9 per cent). One in five became so discouraged they stopped looking for work.

Within this underrepresented group, the impact of these attitudes was experienced more acutely by People living with a disability in the form of:

- Almost three-quarters reported lower self-esteem - 73.9 per cent
- Feelings of isolation - 60.9 per cent
- Feeling miserable - 54.3 per cent
- Stopping their search for work – 25 per cent

Where underrepresented job seekers encounter negative attitudes from potential employers, these factors can contribute to a cycle of negativity.

While employers cited candidate attitude or mindset as a key reason underrepresented groups were not successfully gaining employment - they also admitted that negative perceptions of candidates who were underrepresented in the workforce posed organizational challenges to hiring them.

Constant setbacks and misperceptions, impacting the mental health and wellbeing of job seekers, could be wearing down resilience and contributing to this mindset.

Only one in three Albertan job seekers from underrepresented groups (34.1 per cent) said there were adequate employment opportunities for themselves and others with similar skills and abilities.

Except for a slightly greater organizational capacity to recruit and retain underrepresented candidates in Albertan companies with more than 20 employees, there was little difference between Albertan companies when it came to organizational challenges to hiring:

- More than a quarter of Albertan employers report that their own organizational capability to provide support or accommodations candidates need (26.6 per cent), or their rigid recruitment criteria (27 per cent), are barriers to getting more underrepresented groups through the door

On average, Albertan employers rate their own organization's capability to fill available job openings and to retain newly hired employees higher than they do their capability to recruit and retain underrepresented groups.



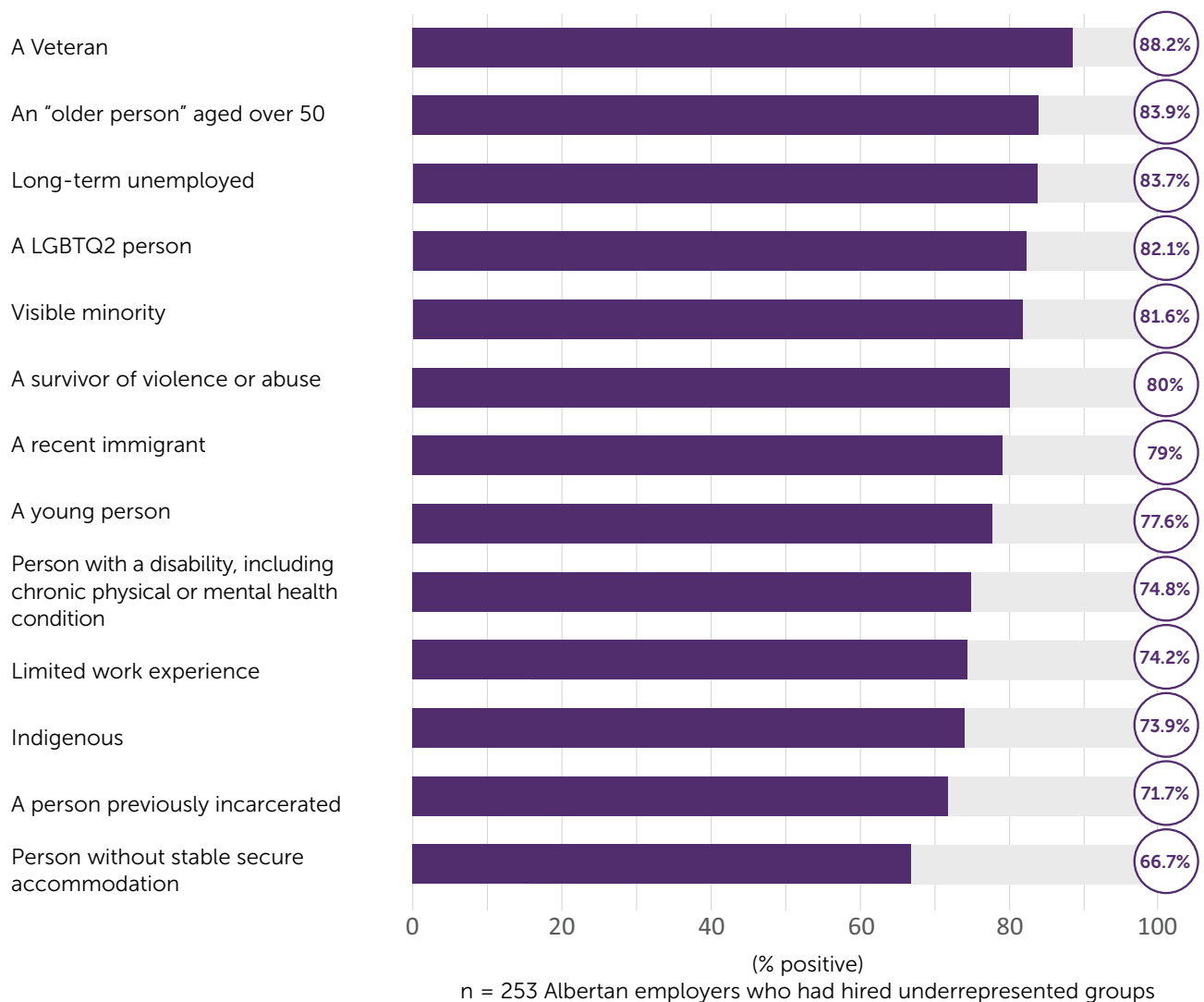


Employers (and individuals) need a navigator to ensure sustainable employment outcomes

Employers who had hired underrepresented job seekers overwhelmingly had a positive experience.

Despite their misgivings about hiring underrepresented job seekers, when asked about their experience hiring these job seekers, more than two thirds of employers reported having a positive experience.

How would you rate your experience employing this person or people?



Yet those employers without this experience face barriers in recruiting and retaining these individuals, due to a lack of organizational capability and confidence about the support required to ensure the hire is successful.

When employers were asked about the key barriers their organization would face in retaining these employees:

- One in three (29.2 per cent) said they were unable to provide longer term support
- One in five (22.3 per cent) said they lacked policies required to provide effective support
- 21.2 per cent (respectively) were unable to offer flexibility or career progression, or cited problems with organizational culture
- 19 per cent also cited lack of confidence in their ability support these employees

“I have been unable to find a job for the times I can work, since in my industry, it doesn’t pay enough to be able to afford childcare.”

(Female, 37 years old, Alberta, Unemployed)

Employers need and value expert support for successful and sustainable job placement.

Almost two in three Albertan employers (65.3 per cent) believe Canadian employers are willing to hire candidates from groups that are typically underrepresented, but job seekers in this cohort are less likely to believe this is the case.

54 per cent those from underrepresented groups said employers are willing or somewhat willing to hire them or others with similar skills and abilities.

Half of Albertan employers (50.7 per cent) said it was easy for their organization to get access to support to recruit and retain underrepresented job seekers. 52.2 per cent the services and support to hire these job seekers were relevant, with 62.4 per cent understanding what they needed to do to access those services.

Despite this, only one in five Albertan employers said their organization had all the support required to recruit (22.3 per cent) and retain (20.1 per cent) those who were typically underrepresented in the workforce.

Of the Albertan employers who needed support from a third party to retain underrepresented groups, the top supports sought were:

- Access to soft skills training - 41.2 per cent
- A mentor to the employee - 35.8 per cent
- HR support - 35.3 per cent
- A support worker to assist the employee where needed - 34.8 per cent

32.8 per cent of these employers said wage subsidies or other financial incentives would be helpful and 22.1 per cent saying they would value a case manager.

Albertan employers say they could offer or would consider offering underrepresented recruits’ access to technical skills training (47.8 per cent), soft skills training (42.7) and flexible work arrangements (41.6 per cent) to help them maintain their employment.



“I was laid off from my job as office manager. Association went virtual and no longer needed my position. I have average skills, am a senior and the job loss gutted my confidence.”

(Female, 59 years old, Alberta, Unemployed)

Job seekers need a navigator, too.

It is not just employers that need support. More than half of Albertan job seekers from underrepresented groups who had experienced challenges looking for work said they struggled to get a job (53.4 per cent).

While a third cited not meeting the education requirements as challenging (35.8 per cent), other common challenges included:

- Low confidence - 32.4 per cent
- Limited work experience - 31.2 per cent
- Gaps in their employment history - 27.8 per cent
- Social isolation - 27.3 per cent

Underrepresented job seekers that had found it challenging to keep a job said the factors that posed the biggest challenge were their injury, illness or disability (37.5 per cent) and fear, anxiety or confusion over what to do (33.3 per cent).

25 per cent of job seekers cited lack of support on the job, with a further 25 per cent citing the way they were treated by their manager or supervisor.

Among employed Albertans who had found it easy to keep their job, flexible working arrangements (55.7 per cent) and on-the-job training were the key things that had contributed.



Soft skills and life skills are just as important as technical skills for employee recruitment and retention

Underrepresented job seekers demonstrate a willingness to upskill to get work.

Albertan employers highlighted a mix of missing “soft” and “hard” skills as reasons underrepresented groups do not make it through the hiring process. Things such as:

- Technical skills - 5.6 per cent
- Their attitude or mindset - 45.3 per cent
- Not having a qualification - 40.5 per cent
- Lack of work experience - 40.1 per cent
- A lack of soft skills - 38 per cent

In contrast to some of these views, nearly seven in 10 (69.3 per cent) job seekers from underrepresented groups have a college or vocational qualification or higher.

The research demonstrates a gap between the perceptions of potential employers who believe job seekers living with injury, illness or disability do not have the education and skills and job seekers, who believe they do.

Albertan job seekers have both the required skills and the capacity to develop them.

Nearly seven in 10 (69.2 per cent) Albertan job seekers from underrepresented groups had taken steps to increase their chances of getting a job in the last 12 months. A further quarter (25.2 per cent) expressed an intention to do so. Common activities included:

- Practicing interviewing skills - 36.5 per cent
- Undertaking formal training or education - 29.7 per cent

Encouragingly, one in four (26 per cent) job seekers from underrepresented groups who had experienced negative attitudes from potential employers said this had prompted them to upskill or retrain.



Soft skills training and HR support are enablers for Albertan employers and job seekers.

Individuals in underrepresented groups said the things that would help them or others with similar skills and abilities find a job were positive attitude or mindset (65.3 per cent) followed by good work experience (62.5 per cent), confidence (60.8 per cent) and education and qualifications (60.2 per cent).

These job seekers would likely benefit from training and support services provided by employment services providers. However, only one in four (25.7 per cent) underrepresented Albertan job seekers had sought help from an employment services provider in the last 12 months.

Albertan job seekers overall cited communication skills (71 per cent), teamwork (63.3 per cent) and problem-solving skills (62.9 per cent) as the top skills required for the jobs they were seeking. Half believe resilience and adaptability is required (50.7 per cent).

When asked what would help them and other employers like them recruit more people from underrepresented groups, Albertan employers nominated the following helpful traits:

- Job readiness training - 42 per cent
- A better understanding of how to adapt job roles for people with different characteristics - 35.4 per cent
- Diversity and inclusiveness training - 34.7 per cent
- Interview training - 32.8 per cent
- Circulation of successful case studies - 32.1 per cent
- Referral from a trusted source - 31 per cent

These findings suggest that access to soft skills training and support by employers of underrepresented job seekers and the job seekers themselves would likely lead to more positive hiring and retention outcomes. They additionally indicate an opportunity to improve the job prospects of underrepresented job seekers by training them in communication skills, adaptability, and job readiness.

The employment services system needs simplifying

Employers and job seekers lack awareness of where to get help.

Despite the long-running role played by employment services providers in Canada, less than half (48.5 per cent) of Albertan employers said they would know how to get help to recruit for underrepresented groups and even fewer unemployed Albertan job seekers (34 per cent) knew where to seek help finding work.

Only 30.7 per cent said it was easy for them to access employment services and support

Take up of employment services providers among Albertan employers is relatively low, and the research suggests the likely drivers are:

- A lack of understanding or confusion about what services are available
- How to access them

Only one in five Albertan employers (20.8 per cent) are currently working with an employment services provider and of those who have never used an employment services provider. Interestingly, a quarter (25 per cent) said this was because they did not want to pay for the services.

17.1 per cent of employers were not aware they existed and 11.8 per cent were not sure how it would benefit their organization

The findings suggest that some employers are not aware employment services are government funded. If employers were aware the services were funded, they may be more likely to use them to improve their diversity and inclusion recruitment and retention.

This, with the demoralizing impact of employer rejection for underrepresented groups, especially people living with a disability, suggests there is a vital role for employment services providers in training and supporting job seekers. This particularly applies to assisting those from disadvantaged cohorts to acquire the soft skills they need to be attractive to an employer and to retain their job.

When asked what would help them find a job, job seekers said:

- Being connected to an employer that was hiring would help - 60.9 per cent
- They needed training to help them prepare for a specific job - 48.7 per cent
- They needed help with a resume and a cover letter - 41.7 per cent

This suggests systemic barriers are contributing to confusion for Albertan job seekers and a need to reduce complexity to avoid intensifying the anxiety and confusion already being experienced by so many job seekers.



People with disabilities

People with disabilities (PWD) make up approximately 22 per cent of the Canadian population according to latest official figures¹. Almost six times more likely to be survivors of domestic violence or abuse (29.3 per cent) and more than three times as likely to identify as LGBTQ2 (24.4 per cent), they are also more likely to be Indigenous, long term unemployed or to have limited work experience than their peers without a disability. The result is over-representation of PWD among both unemployed Canadians (29.9 per cent) and employed Canadians from groups underrepresented in the workforce (20.7 per cent).

Canadians with a disability self-rate their employability lower than other Canadians. Their perceptions are likely influenced by frequent encounters with employer misperceptions (78.2 per cent). Employers are also witnessing a range of employment-related misperceptions among their peers (64.5 per cent). One of the most common observations of these employers was negativity about hiring PWD or chronic illness (45.0 per cent).

The impact of these negative employer encounters on Canadians with a disability is stark. More than two in three (67.5 per cent) say their self-esteem has suffered, more than half (55.5 per cent) were left feeling isolated and almost as many miserable (54.8 per cent). The effects persist among those who are employed, with a third (34.4 per cent) feeling unable to ask for the supports they need and close to half (44.9 per cent) saying fear, anxiety and confusion impact their ability to retain employment. The influence on prevailing employer perceptions is challenging, given two in five (42.0 per cent) employers say candidate attitude and mindset are key factors preventing underrepresented groups from securing employment.

Despite the challenges they face, most unemployed Canadians with a disability have taken steps to increase their employability in the last year (71.9 per cent). They are actively searching and researching, submitting applications and reaching out to find opportunities. More likely than other Canadians to report weak communication skills, two in five (41.6 per cent) of those who have been upskilling in the last 12 months have taken steps to directly address this.

While employers are more focused on whether they can adapt roles and provide supports or accommodations, less than one in four (22.5 per cent) Canadians with a disability say this is what they need. Instead, flexible working arrangements, something all Canadians are more familiar with due to the pandemic, are the most common support required (57.3 per cent). And while help managing their disability is useful for nearly half (49.4 per cent), the desire for meaningful employment and career progression are clear, with upskilling (42.5 per cent), on-the-job training (44.7 per cent) and real promotion opportunities (35.2 per cent) important to many Canadians with a disability.

¹ Statistics Canada. Table 13-10-0348-01 Labour force status for adults with disabilities by disability type <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2018002-eng.htm>

“As a single mother it can be challenging to find employers willing to give as flexible of a schedule as sometimes needed.”

(Female, 23 years old, Alberta, Employed)

Women face structural barriers magnified by local economic conditions

Nationally, women have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

The impact has been borne most strongly by young women, mothers, racialized and immigrant women.² In Alberta, participation rates for women from 2019 to 2020 fell 2.8 percentage points, compared to 2.1 percentage points for men.³

Alberta was one of the worst hit provinces in terms of women's employment rates. The province ended the year 5.2 percentage points down on February 2020 levels, compared to the 3.7 percentage point contraction recorded nationally.⁴

Drivers of such differences in western Canadian provinces, including Alberta were:

- Women's concentration in harder-hit, front-facing industries and part-time roles compared to other parts of Canada.
- Women's existing economic precariousness in Alberta, compared to other Canadian regions.
- Local cuts to employment in health services and social assistance in Alberta disproportionately impacting women.⁵

Our research found negative employer attitudes and misperceptions encountered by female Albertan job seekers suggest this may be a consequence of decreased employer flexibility during the pandemic. Women were much more likely than men (37.5 per cent vs 26.4 per cent) to encounter the attitude that hiring people who need flexible workdays and hours is too difficult, as was the case for the attitude that people with gaps in their resumes are not good employees (39.4 per cent vs 25.0 per cent).

^{2 & 3} Statistics Canada, Labour force characteristics by province, region and Indigenous group, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410036401&pickMembers%5B0%5D=3.7&pickMembers%5B1%5D=4.2&pickMembers%5B2%5D=5.1&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2016&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2020&referencePeriods=20160101%2C20200101>

^{4 & 5} Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Women, Work and COVID-19, <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2021/03/Women%20work%20and%20COVID.pdf>







Conclusion

We hope this report has helped contribute to the conversation about the need to rebuild the world of work. The research demonstrated a clear need to simplify employment services so that job seekers make successful labour market transitions and more employers are able to meet their workforce needs.

Our survey put the spotlight on four key areas that, if addressed, will support employment growth in Alberta.

1. Employer misperceptions hampering progress

While our findings demonstrate that employer misperceptions are hampering progress, employers told us they need and value expert support for successful and sustainable job placement.

2. Employers (and individuals) need a navigator to ensure sustainable employment outcomes

This research underscored the need for a 'navigator' to help job seekers gain and retain employment and help employers to achieve more sustainable employment outcomes for their employees.

3. Soft skills and life skills are just as important as technical skills for employee recruitment and retention

We found that soft skills are seen by employers as just as valuable as technical skills in the workplace. This is an important insight, as it challenges misperceptions that barred job seekers, particularly those without prior work experience, either do not have or cannot develop the required skills to get and keep a job.

4. The employment services system needs simplifying

Finally, to meet labour market needs, employers and job seekers need employment services that are easy to use and access. Our research highlights the continued work that is needed to ensure equitable and sustainable outcomes in Alberta and in Canada more generally.

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